

Azalea Cormier
Buckfield
LD 785

My name is Azalea Cormier, I am a resident of Buckfield, and I am testifying in support of LD 785.

I am tired and ashamed of the way the State of Maine continues to neglect the Wabanaki Nations' inherent right to sovereignty. As it stands now, the 1980 Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act continues to limit their autonomy in ways that no other tribes in the country experience.

This State's motto is "Dirigo," our declaration of leadership in the nation, which I believe voters affirmed to be our desired reputation with the rejection of a modernized flag at the ballot box. Yet in matters of tribal sovereignty, we stand last in the nation because of the restrictions imposed by the 1980 Act. As a lifelong Mainer who wants to be proud of our state, I find this unacceptable.

The consequences of the restrictions we as a State impose on them are not abstract. The Act has constrained economic development, reduced opportunities for self-determination, and contributed to disproportionately high levels of childhood poverty among Wabanaki communities, at rates more than threefold the (already too high) overall state child poverty rate.

This can no longer be blamed on Legislators of days gone by, this is now a policy failure perpetuated in our time. You, our legislators, have not just the power to correct this, but the overwhelming support of the people of Maine. Amending the 1980 Act to restore full tribal sovereignty would not just align Maine with federal Native American policy but also the will of our people, and strengthen our state's moral standing and economic future. We elected you to represent our State – I implore you to do this faithfully, and allow us to begin to lead on this matter as we should have been long ago.