

Ruby Forde
JustME for JustUS
LD 785

Testimony of Ruby Forde
Maine - Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary
February 19, 2026

Testimony in Support of LD 395, “An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations” and LD 785, “An Act to Enact the Remaining Recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act”

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, and dedicated staff: My name is Ruby Forde, and I am writing in support of LD 395 and LD 785 – legislation that would restore and expand Wabanaki sovereignty in what is now called Maine.

I am called to this support on a professional, and a personal level. As an organizer with JustMe for JustUs, support for Wabanaki sovereignty is a priority area of our advocacy. Our organization has long held that Wabanaki Nations have the inherent right to self-govern and to steward this land — land they have cared for and sustained for thousands of years. Restoring this sovereignty strengthens rural communities, creates resilient local economies, and offers young people models of leadership, stewardship, and self-determination.

I am also an outdoor educator in MSAD17, where I have worked closely with the Department of Education and the Wabanaki Specialist to integrate Wabanaki Studies into our curriculum as a core component of outdoor and place-based learning. This work has profoundly shaped how my students understand history, ecology, and their relationship to the land they live and learn on. Yet this work also raises an uncomfortable and important question: How can I teach students about the history and sovereignty of the Wabanaki Nations when state laws continue to deny those same nations full self-determination today? The disconnect between what we teach and what we practice undermines the integrity of our education and our values as a state.

LD 395 and LD 785 take meaningful steps toward addressing this contradiction. Together, they modernize outdated laws that have left the Wabanaki Nations uniquely excluded from federal protections and programs and have limited their ability to govern in ways that nearly all other federally recognized tribes can. These bills are not about granting special treatment — they are about restoring fairness, equity, and dignity.

For the above reasons, I urge you to vote in favor of both LD 395 and LD 785. Thank you again for your time in considering this written testimony.

Sincerely,
Ruby Forde