

Thea Hart
Belfast
LD 395

To: Committee on Judiciary
From: Thea Hart, Belfast Maine
Date: 2/17/26

RE: Testimony in support of LD 395, An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and members of the Committee on Judiciary,
My name is Thea Hart, and I am an artist, student of Interfaith Ministry, and resident of Belfast.

I am testifying in support of LD 395, An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations. For forty years, the 1980 Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act (MICSA) has blocked Wabanaki Nations from accessing all federal policies that have supported the other 570 federally recognized Tribes. Amending it would benefit not only the Wabanaki Nations, but also rural Maine, according to a 2022 analysis by the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development. Removing the jurisdictional barriers would help the Wabanaki Nations take advantage of federal self-determination policies, programs, and funding that elsewhere in Indian Country have led to the creation of thousands of jobs and hundreds of millions of dollars in goods and services produced by Native businesses.

LD 395 is co-sponsored by Democratic, Republican, and Independent legislators, including leadership in both caucuses in both chambers, and is similar to legislation that passed the Maine House and Senate in 2023 with broad bipartisan support before it was vetoed by Gov. Janet Mills. It does not change existing gaming laws.

I would urge you to consider that we all suffer when our neighbors suffer, and therefore we are all empowered when our neighbors are empowered. To paraphrase Shirley Hager, a white Mainer and co-author of *The Gatherings: Reimagining Indigenous-Settler Relations*, not only are the lives and opportunities of Wabanaki folks diminished, but the lives of settler-descendants, all Mainers, and the health of our land are also diminished when the perspectives, influence, and sovereignty of the Wabanaki Nations are thwarted.

It's time our state government recognize the right and authority of the Wabanaki Nations to self-govern on equal footing with the other 570 federally recognized tribes in the U.S. For these reasons, I respectfully encourage you to support LD 395. Thank you for your time and consideration of my testimony.

Sincerely,
Thea Hart