

Thea Hart
Belfast
LD 785

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

RE: Testimony in support of 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, 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 785, An Act to Enact the Remaining
Recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims
Settlement Implementing Act because, it's time to honor Wabanaki sovereignty. The
1980 Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act (MICSA) has blocked Wabanaki Nations
from accessing all federal policies that have supported job and economic growth for the
other 570 federally recognized Tribes. The politicians who drafted the 1980
Settlement Act called it a "living document," intended to be amended, and its current
form, it harms our Wabanaki neighbors by suppressing and ignoring their sovereignty
as Nations which existed here long before Maine did.

Honoring Wabanaki sovereignty is not a threat to Maine government, it is a blessing.
The beauty and richness we enjoy in Maine is a blessing we receive from the
Wabanaki, who have stewarded it for thousands of years. Enacting LD 785 would
empower their Nation's sovereignty to continue the vital work of stewardship.
Economically, Harvard researchers project that tribal self-government would add
\$330 million annually to Maine's GDP, create 2,700+ jobs (more than half filled by
non-tribal rural Mainers), and generate \$39 million yearly in state and local tax
revenue.

Aside from the environmental and economic benefits of LD 785, I would urge you to
consider that we all suffer when our neighbors suffer. And, 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 neglected and
thwarted.

It's shameful that our state, who had led by example in many ways, has left MICSA
unchanged. 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 785. Thank you for your time and consideration of my testimony.

Sincerely,
Thea Hart