

Carey Hotaling
Freeport
LD 785

To: Committee on Judiciary
From: Carey Hotaling, Freeport, Maine
Date: 2/17/2026
RE: Testimony in Support of LD 785

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and members of the Committee on Judiciary,

My name is Carey Hotaling and I am a retired teacher living in Freeport. I am testifying in support of LD 785 because it levels the playing field for the Wabanaki Nations and removes barriers that have held them back for more than 40 years.

There is strong and growing public support for Wabanaki Sovereignty. More than 1,600 Mainers testified in record numbers in support of tribal sovereignty legislation based on the consensus recommendations of a bipartisan legislative task force. Environmental organizations, social justice groups, organized labor, and faith communities have voiced strong support on behalf of tens of thousands of members. More than 250 businesses and organizations have joined the Wabanaki Alliance Tribal Coalition, including the newly formed “Businesses for Wabanaki Sovereignty.”

Since passage of the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act, the Wabanaki Nations have been blocked from accessing many federal self-determination policies that have helped 570 other federally recognized tribes create thousands of jobs and generate hundreds of millions of dollars in economic activity. While tribal income outside of Maine has grown 61% since 1989, Wabanaki income has grown only 9%, compared to Maine’s overall growth of 25%. It is clear the current framework is not working.

Children are bearing the brunt of these restrictions. Childhood poverty in Wabanaki communities ranges from 40% to 77%, compared to 15% statewide. We cannot ignore the impact that outdated policy is having on the next generation.

Modernizing the Settlement Act is an economic win-win. Researchers at the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development project that strengthening tribal self-government would add approximately \$330 million annually to Maine’s GDP, create more than 2,700 jobs — more than half filled by non-tribal rural Mainers — and generate \$39 million each year in state and local tax revenue. When the Wabanaki thrive, rural Maine thrives.

Importantly, the Settlement Act was designed to evolve. The original drafters described it as a “living document,” and the law itself allows Maine, the Passamaquoddy Tribe, and the Penobscot Nation to amend it. After more than four decades of harmful consequences. It is time to remove the barriers that have prevented the Wabanaki Nations and their rural Maine neighbors from achieving the economic resurgence seen across Indian Country.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to support LD 785. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Carey Hotaling