

TESTIIMONY FOR LD 785

To: Committee on Judiciary

From: Helena Ives, New Gloucester, Maine

Date: February 19, 2026

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 esteemed members of the Committee on Judiciary,

My name is Helena Ives. I am a parent and educator from New Gloucester, and a descendant of a family that has called this land home since 1650. Today, I write with urgency and unwavering conviction in support of LD 785.

As a parent, I am profoundly shaken by the harsh reality detailed in this bill's background. The statistics regarding childhood poverty in Wabanaki communities are stark: 40 to 77 percent, compared to Maine's overall rate of just 15 percent. These are not just numbers; they represent children—innocent lives in the same state my family has lived in for generations—bearing the crippling weight of a policy failure that has persisted for four long decades. This is a situation that demands our immediate attention and action.

As an educator, I hold a deep appreciation for the wisdom of those who came before us. The Wabanaki Nations have nurtured and cultivated a sustainable relationship with this land for thousands of years, enriching our ecological knowledge and stewardship practices. Their insights are crucial, not only for their communities but for tackling the pressing environmental challenges we face in Maine today. LD 785 empowers the Wabanaki Nations to self-govern, allowing them to protect their lands and waters in ways that benefit all of us in the region.

This bill reflects the culmination of the remaining recommendations from a bipartisan task force, established with the express purpose of addressing the failures of the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act (MICSA). The original architects of the 1980 settlement called it a "living document," designed to evolve with our society. The thoughtful, collaborative work that has led to these recommendations deserves our support. Over 1,600 Mainers spoke out in record numbers to express their support, alongside more than 300 organizations and businesses that stand in solidarity with this initiative.

I cannot ignore that my family played a role in the historical injustices that led to taking this land from the Wabanaki nearly four centuries ago. Passing LD 785 is not just a legislative act; it is an opportunity to take a step toward a relationship defined by equity and mutual respect. It is a chance to acknowledge our intertwined histories and work toward a more just future.

I urge you not just to support this bill, but to champion it as a vital step toward rectifying a historical wrong and building a better Maine for everyone.

With sincerity and hope,

Helena Ives