



February 19, 2026

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee,

I join you today on behalf of the Maine Women's Lobby. For over forty years, the Maine Women's Lobby has worked to build gender justice in Maine through legislative advocacy and systems change.

We are here in support of **LD 395, "An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations,"** and thank Senator Talbot Ross for sponsoring this important bill. We also offer our thanks to the Wabanaki people of this region - the people of the Aroostook Band of Micmacs, the Houlton Band of Maliseets, the Passamaquoddy Tribes at Motahkokmikuk and Sipayuk, and the Penobscot Nation. We thank them for their care and commitment, and to the Wabanaki Alliance for organizing the voices and experiences before the committee today.

Our work at the Maine Women's Lobby is rooted in the idea that public policy can be used as a tool to hold and consolidate power and resources, or as a tool of justice, building equity across gender, race, class, and more. **For too long, Maine's public policy has held on to old notions of policy and power when it comes to the relationship with the Wabanaki Nations.** Indeed, when the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 was passed at the national level, Maine was one of the last states to enact the Act in the late 1930s¹. Now, Maine is one of the only states which persists in maintaining a relationship with the Tribes which denies them access to rights granted under federal law, including the inherent right to self-determination and self-governance.

At every turn policy has been used to keep resources and power in the hands of the few, at great cost to the region's people, land, water, and all living things. **We see the effects of this harm in myriad ways – one clear example is on the lives of Native women and girls, who are dramatically more likely to experience sexual violence, domestic violence, stalking, and other forms of interpersonal trauma that are a result of colonization², and legal structures that have disempowered the Tribes from meaningful response³.**

Currently, the Wabanaki Nations are the only federally recognized tribes that must be explicitly written into each federal law to benefit from it. It doesn't have to be this way. Nearly every other state has chosen a different path – one that aligns with the federal standards, and one which is more respectful of the inherent right of the Tribes to self-govern. It's time for Maine to make a

¹ Library of Congress. (n.d.). Voting Rights for Native Americans. Retrieved from

<https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/elections/right-to-vote/voting-rights-for-native-americans/>

²National Institute of Justice. (2016). Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women: a Report. Retrieved from

<https://www.bia.gov/service/mmu/missing-and-murdered-indigenous-people-crisis>

³ Cifillilo. (2021). Legal Barriers to Tribal Jurisdiction over Violence Against Women in Maine: Developments and Paths Forward in Maine: Developments and Paths Forward; Maine Law Review. Retrieved from

<https://www.bia.gov/service/mmu/missing-and-murdered-indigenous-people-crisis>

different choice. LD 395 would modernize the *1980 Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act* (MICSA) and the *Aroostook Band of Micmacs Settlement Act* so that the Wabanaki Nations can benefit from most existing and future federal laws that apply to the other 570 federally recognized tribes.

At the heart of our work for gender equity and feminist public policy advocacy is the notion of self-determination and the dignity of bodily autonomy as a human right. We could not continue to work for these principles without supporting the same rights and recognition for the original stewards of these lands. We stand with the Wabanaki people in this work.

We hope you will vote 'ought to pass' on LD 395. Thank you for your time, and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

Lily Bohem James
Maine Women's Lobby