



To: Senator Anne Carney, Senate Chair of the Judiciary Committee
Representative Amy Kuhn, House Chair of the Judiciary Committee
Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary

Date: February 18th, 2026

RE: LD 395 – An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations

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

My name is Kage Johnson, and I am a resident of Winslow, Maine. I am testifying in favor of LD 395 on behalf of Healing First! and as an individual; I am a transformative justice practitioner, steering member of the Maine Restorative Justice Coalition (MERJ), and Co-Executive Director of Wabanaki-led nonprofit, nibe zun. Healing First! is in full and earnest support of LD 395.

Healing First! is a Maine-based transformative justice collective led by survivors of serious harm, advocating for restorative & transformative justice as accessible options for everyone. Part of our vision includes a world in which pathways for justice and healing are widely accessible for all. We believe in collective liberation. This includes upholding and supporting the inherent tribal sovereignty of all Indigenous peoples.

Honoring and upholding tribal sovereignty is akin to supporting basic human rights. Sovereignty is essentially self-determination, which is considered a fundamental human right under international law. Shame on the state of Maine for the continued, decades-long subjugation of the Wabanaki Nations, the First Peoples of this land who have stewarded and continue to steward the land of this region that we all love.

The average age of death for Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, and Maliseet people is 54 years old.¹ I ask us to consider: What role has the state of Maine played in creating or maintaining the conditions for this reality and such statistics to exist?

Maine has directly impeded laws that would benefit the wellbeing of Wabanaki communities across the Dawnland, including but not limited to the Indian Health Care

Improvement Act (IHClA) and Environmental Protection Laws, such as The Clean Water Act and Clean Air Act.² The state has positioned itself in opposition to Wabanaki wellbeing.

Maine has fought to block access to many of the 150+ federal laws Congress enacted since 1980 for the benefit of tribal nations.² Without access to policies, programs, and funding that build and support self-governance, Wabanaki Nations and their surrounding rural communities have faced severely stunted economic growth and have suffered greater disadvantages in terms of health and wellbeing.

Poverty is strongly correlated to poor health outcomes, less access to education, and is a leading predictor of both experiencing and/or causing violence and increased likelihood of incarceration. We, as humanity, should be focused on resourcing, empowering, and creating healthy, flourishing communities. By not upholding and investing in Wabanaki tribal sovereignty, Maine is disadvantaging Wabanaki peoples and our collective future.

Meanwhile, a Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development study in 2022 demonstrates that modernizing the Settlement Acts would improve the economy for everyone, generating hundreds of millions of dollars in goods and services made by Native businesses.³ This bill would address 40 years of missed opportunities and existing disparities. And LD 395 has broad bipartisan support.⁴ The right choice is clear.

The real question is: Why should Maine continue to subjugate Wabanaki people, our fellow neighbors, to being treated differently than other federally recognized tribes, in ways that negatively impact them, rural communities, and our wider communities throughout Maine for generations to come?

I passionately restate my and Healing First!'s position of being in full support of LD 395. Please ensure that the Wabanaki are not excluded from legislation benefitting all other federal tribes by honoring Wabanaki people's actual, full, and rightful tribal sovereignty—something that never should be undermined in the first place.

Sincerely,

Kage Johnson, on behalf of Healing First!

Citations:

1. https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1109&context=muskie_capstones#:~:text=impacts%20these%20communities.-,Background,is%20twice%20the%20national%20rate.
2. <https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/3815>
3. <https://wabanakialliance.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/2022-12-2-Economic-Social-Impacts-Fed-Indian-Policies-to-Wabanaki-Nations-final.pdf>
4. <https://www.wabanakialliance.com/legislature-passes-ld2004/>