



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 18<sup>th</sup>, 2026

RE: LD 785 – An Act to Enact the Remaining Recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act

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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 785 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, nibezun. Healing First! is in full and earnest support of LD 785.

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 actively investing in the inherent tribal sovereignty of all Indigenous peoples.

The politicians who drafted the 1980 Settlement Act called it a “living document,” meaning that it was intended to be updated and to evolve. The law itself allows Maine, the Passamaquoddy Tribe, and Penobscot Nation to amend it. To call something a “living document” and not amend it, while weaponizing it to prevent a population of people from being able to experience their inherent tribal sovereignty is vile. Harm has been done.

For 40 years, the 1980 Settlement Act has prevented the Wabanaki Nations from accessing federal self-determination policies that helped 570 other tribes to create thousands of jobs and generate hundreds of millions of dollars in economic activity. Tribal income outside of

Maine grew 61% since 1989, while Wabanaki income grew only 9% (compared to Maine's 25% overall).<sup>1</sup>

Childhood poverty in Wabanaki communities ranges from 40% to 77%, compared to the state's 15% overall rate.<sup>2</sup> 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, which perpetuates a cycle of trauma and harm. By not investing in Wabanaki tribal sovereignty, Maine is disadvantaging Wabanaki peoples and our collective future. We, as humanity, should be focused on resourcing, empowering, and creating healthy, flourishing communities.

A Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development study in 2022 projected 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.<sup>3</sup> When Wabanaki thrive, so does rural Maine and the rest of us.

Just imagine— Imagine if, instead of lagging more decades behind— Imagine if Maine were to become a state leading the charge, advancing and strengthening tribal sovereignty, and therefore improving life for all communities across the state. Imagine what our world could look like if Maine genuinely invested in Wabanaki tribal sovereignty. **We have the opportunity to do so.**

Over 1,600 Mainers from across the entire state previously testified *in record numbers* in favor of passing a tribal sovereignty bill based on consensus recommendations made by a legislative task force.<sup>4</sup> More than 300 organizations and businesses have joined the Wabanaki Alliance Tribal Coalition. We stand before you again, demonstrating what the people of Maine stand for. You have a duty to listen to the ample voices of your constituents.

I passionately restate my and Healing First!'s position of being in full support of LD 785. **Please invest in our collective future— the future of Wabanaki people, rural Mainers, and all communities across the Dawndland by supporting LD 785.**

Sincerely,

Kage Johnson, on behalf of Healing First!

Citations:

1. <https://themainemonitor.org/tribes-in-maine-left-out-of-native-american-resurgence-by-40-year-old-federal-law-denying-their-self-determination/>
2. <https://www.quoddytides.com/wabanaki-economic-development-eyed-study-sovereignty-would-help-tribes-state/>
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://legislature.maine.gov/doc/3815>