

Testimony in Support of LD 395 “An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations”

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Good morning, Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary. My name is James Myall and I’m a policy analyst at the Maine Center for Economic Policy. I’m here today to testify in support of LD 395 “An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations” both because the Wabanaki deserve the same protection of federal laws as other federally recognized tribes, and because doing so will benefit all of Maine economically.

Last year, MECEP released *Sovereignty Starts Here: Land, Economy, and Tribal Rights in Maine*,¹ a report which demonstrates the value of tribal sovereignty to Maine’s economy. We looked at several aspects of tribal sovereignty in that report, but I wanted to highlight a couple of findings that are relevant to this bill.

The unique legal relationship between the Wabanaki Nations and Maine creates uncertainty which discourages outside investment in tribal projects and holds back economic development on tribal land. Applying federal law via LD 395 will provide clarity through a familiar framework which is already in use across the country by 570 other tribes. It will also allow for more innovative forms of economic development that Maine law currently permits. Across the United States, other federally recognized tribes have built on thousands of years of Indigenous knowledge to build ventures in tourism, responsible resource management, and conservation.

LD 395 will also open up more opportunities for the Wabanaki Nations to apply for federal grant funding. MECEP’s comparison of federal funding received by tribes across the country and the Wabanaki Nations suggests that the Wabanaki could be missing out on millions of dollars in federal grant funding each year due to current restrictions.²

Importantly, success for the Wabanaki Nations benefits all of us. Those funds are not just investments in Wabanaki Nations but also in Maine communities. Experiences elsewhere in Indian country show that tribal projects employ many non-Indigenous people, and increased economic activity in tribal communities also boosts neighboring economies. In Maine, this means much-needed development in rural parts of the state.

Tribal sovereignty is a moral imperative. Mainers have an obligation to correct centuries of a colonial mindset that has disadvantaged Wabanaki people and held all of us back. LD 395 does not do that, but it does take an important step that would bring legal consistency under federal Indian law and could bring millions of dollars in grants and investments to the Wabanaki and their Maine neighbors. For those reasons, we urge you to vote “ought to pass” on LD 395.

Thank you. I’m happy to answer any questions.

Notes

¹ James Myall, “Sovereignty Starts Here: Land, Economy, and Tribal Rights in Maine.” *Maine Center for Economic Policy*. Oct 14, 2025. <https://www.mecep.org/maines-economy/sovereignty-starts-here/>

² Based on a MECEP comparison of the top 100 sources of federal funding for federally-recognized tribes between 2015-2019. Of these, 20 programs were identified as being potentially applicable to the Wabanaki Nations but for which the Wabanaki received no funding over the time period. On average, these programs provided \$477 per tribal citizen per year, the equivalent of \$4.55 million per year for the Wabanaki Nations. Analysis conducted using USASpending.gov