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Maine's Rural Development Council



**Testimony of Joe Oliva, Outreach and Communications Director of  
GrowSmart Maine  
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**

February 19, 2025

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

My name is Joe Oliva and I am the Outreach and Communications Director of GrowSmart Maine. We are a statewide non-partisan non-profit organization helping communities navigate change in alignment with smart growth. We advocate for comprehensive policies and funding for smart growth practices and outcomes.

As a member of the Wabanaki Alliance Tribal Coalition since 2022, GrowSmart supports LD 785 because it enhances equity, economic opportunity, and environmental stewardship. Equity is integral to smart growth, in which the overarching vision is that people feel safe, that they belong, and that they can thrive in their communities. To that end, LD 785 levels the playing field for the Wabanaki Nations.

For 40 years, restrictions in the 1980 Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act (MICSA) have blocked the Wabanaki Nations from accessing all of the federal self-determination policies that helped 570 other tribes create thousands of jobs and generate hundreds of millions in economic activity. While tribal income outside of Maine grew 61% since 1989, Wabanaki income grew only 9% (compared to Maine's 25% overall). It is time to remove those barriers and allow the Wabanaki Nations fuller participation in the economy.

While Maine can take pride in recent decades of strategic land conservation and regulatory protections for productive and open lands and water to benefit natural resource sector enterprises, recreational users, and fisheries and wildlife, Wabanaki peoples protected these natural resources through sustainable practices for millenia, long before we arrived here. It is appropriate and necessary to respect this heritage with passage and

implementation of LD 2007.

If invited, GrowSmart Maine is willing to support Wabanaki efforts in creating economic opportunities and sustainable communities in alignment with smart growth. It's time to remove the barriers that have kept the Wabanaki and their rural Maine neighbors from achieving the dramatic and sustained economic growth achieved over the past 40 years by 570 federal tribes across Indian Country.