



To: Sen. Carney, Rep. Kuhn, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary

From: Maine Appalachian Trail Land Trust

Re: Support for LD 785, An Act to Advance Self-determination for Wabanaki Nations

February 17, 2026

On behalf of the staff, volunteers, and Board members of the Maine Appalachian Trail Land Trust, I am writing to voice our organization's full support of LD 395, *An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations*. If passed, this bill will hold great significance and have a powerful impact for the Wabanaki Nations and on the non-native communities in Wabanaki homelands now called Maine.

The Maine Appalachian Trail Land Trust is an independent land trust for the purpose of acquiring and protecting the land surrounding the Appalachian Trail in Maine for public benefit. We participate with the First Light organization, a collaborative of more than 60 organizations working together to return land, land access, money, and decision-making authority to the Wabanaki Nations of Maine. We recognize that when land and sovereignty is returned to the Wabanaki people, their communities and all non-native communities within the state of Maine benefit. LD 395 puts the Wabanaki Nations on equal footing with all other federally recognized tribes. Currently, the Wabanaki Nations are the only federally recognized tribes that must be explicitly written into each federal law to benefit from it. 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.

Amending the two acts would benefit not only the Wabanaki Nations, but also rural Maine, according to a 2022 analysis by the *Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development*. Removing the jurisdictional barriers would help the Wabanaki Nations take advantage of federal self-determination policies, programs, and funding that elsewhere in Indian Country have led to the creation of thousands of jobs and hundreds of millions of dollars in goods and services produced by Native businesses.

We support 395 and we strongly encourage you to vote for its passage.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Simon Rucker', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Simon Rucker  
Executive Director  
On Behalf of the Maine Appalachian Trail Land Trust