



**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 785, *An Act to Enact the Remaining Recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act (MICSA)*. 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. We recognize that the Wabanaki have been protecting the environment and maintaining sustainable ecological practices for millennia, long before European settlement of Maine. They will continue to do so; it's their heritage and birthright as Wabanaki peoples. The land we protect is part of the traditional homelands of the Wabanaki Nations and as such, 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.

Under the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act, the Wabanaki Nations — and the state of Maine — are prevented from benefiting from more than 150 federal laws passed since 1980. Because of MICSA, Maine's Indigenous population has missed out on important opportunities in economic development, health care, housing, environmental protections, disaster response, and development of tribal government services. Reports have shown that the tribes' lack of self-governance under MICSA has resulted in lagging economic growth for Wabanaki Nations, as well as their surrounding

communities<sup>1</sup>. In addition to loss of income, the lag also represents thousands of lost jobs, millions of dollars in lost tax revenue, and loss of opportunity for both tribal and non-tribal citizens. Maine has had to use its own resources to try to address these losses.

LD 785 implements several of the consensus recommendations of the 2020 report by the *Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act*; it takes meaningful and critical steps to ensure that Wabanaki Nations have the same rights, powers, privileges, and immunities as other federally recognized tribes in the United States. The legislators who drafted the 1980 Settlement Act called it a “living document” meant to be updated. The law itself allows Maine, the Passamaquoddy Tribe, and Penobscot Nation to amend it and after more than 40 years, it is passed time to do so.

We support 785 and we strongly encourage you to vote for their passage.

Respectfully submitted,



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

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<sup>1</sup> 2019 report by the Suffolk Law School and a 2022 report by the Harvard Kennedy School