



**Testimony of Sarah Woodbury, Legislative Director, Maine Conservation Alliance,  
Representing the Environmental Priorities Coalition 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, 2026**

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Sarah Woodbury. I am the Legislative Director at Maine Conservation Alliance, a statewide non-profit organization with 13,000 members and supporters that is building a just, thriving future for all by acting on the climate crisis, protecting the environment, and safeguarding our democracy. I am here today to testify on behalf of the Environmental Priorities Coalition (EPC) 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*”. The EPC is an inclusive statewide alliance of 41 conservation, climate action, and public health organizations. Each year we collectively identify a slate of policy priorities to act on the climate crisis, further environmental justice, protect land, water, and wildlife, and cultivate healthy Maine communities. LD 785 is one of those priorities.

The EPC supports LD 785 because it is long past time to recognize the sovereign rights of the Wabanaki nations. Wabanaki sovereignty is central to protecting the air, land, water, and our shared climate future in Maine. Beyond that, the Wabanaki people long predate the United States and have inherent rights to self-govern.

For the last 40 years, however, the Wabanaki Tribes have been denied the right to regulate land use and natural resources on their own land as they deem appropriate because of restrictions in the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act and the Maine Implementing Act. The State of Maine has used these acts to limit tribal sovereignty in multiple ways, harming the tribes, putting public health and the environment at risk, and leading to legal disputes.

None of the other 570 federally-recognized tribes in the United States live under the same restrictions as the Wabanaki nations. They are excluded from federal legislation that ensures tribes’ inherent rights to govern themselves and have not benefited from over 150 Federal Indian Laws passed since the Maine acts. These benefits include funding for clean drinking water, river protection, and environmental restoration projects, which would help not just the tribes, but also the rural Maine communities that neighbor them. Maine has a chance to begin to set tribal-state relations right and fully recognize the sovereignty of the Wabanaki nations by passing LD 785. This bill would restore the Wabanaki Tribes’

inherent rights of self-governance and is based on the recommendations of a bipartisan task force of legislators to change the Maine Implementing Act.

We've heard arguments that environmental protections will be weaker, while at the same time hearing concerns that protections will be more stringent. These opposing arguments stem from a lack of knowledge, fear of losing control, and fear of change. Those of us who have worked closely with the Wabanaki people and learned from them know that these fears are not based on fact. The Wabanaki people have lived in what is now called Maine for thousands of years. Throughout those millennia, the tribes have lived in close relationship with the land and water, protecting natural resources so that future generations could thrive.

But, at the end of the day, it is not for us, or industry, or the State of Maine, or anyone else to judge what the tribes may do on their lands or to decide whether to restore their rights based on those predictions. Those rights are inherent, not for any other government to grant or revoke - including the United States and the State of Maine, which have existed for a blink of an eye relative to the Wabanaki Tribes. This is a fact that the United States and every other state in the nation respects. It is time for the State of Maine to do the same.

**The Wabanaki Tribes are the original people of this place we call Maine. There is no better way to protect Maine's lands and waters than to restore tribal sovereignty. Please vote "ought to pass" on LD 785. Thank you.**