

**February 19, 2026**

Good morning, Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and esteemed Members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Bella Sturtevant and I am a resident of Leeds and a member of the Wabanaki Youth Policy Coalition with the Wabanaki Alliance and Maine Environmental Education Association. I am also a Rural Youth Organizer with JustME for JustUS (a youth-led climate justice rural youth focused nonprofit). I'm writing in strong support of the bipartisan bill LD 395: An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations.

Right now, the Wabanaki are the only tribes in the country that do not have tribal sovereignty. As things are now, they must be explicitly written into each individual federal law in order to benefit from it. This has already been harming the Wabanaki Nations. They have been denied direct access to emergency funding under the Stafford Act, including resources to respond to natural disasters and public health crises like the opioid epidemic. Implementation of the Violence Against Women Act provisions that allow tribes to arrest and prosecute certain non-tribal domestic violence offenders was blocked in Maine until a separate state law was passed after lengthy negotiations. Under the Indian Health Care Improvement Act, tribes elsewhere have been able to recruit licensed medical professionals to rural tribal health centers, but Maine has tried to prevent Wabanaki Nations from using this authority, making it harder to meet critical health care needs in their communities. Wabanaki Nations have also been blocked from assuming regulatory authority under key environmental laws like the Clean Water Act and Clean Air Act, limiting their ability to protect water quality, ensure clean drinking water, and restore wildlife and marine habitats on their lands.

A 2022 analysis by the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development found that removing these jurisdictional barriers would help Wabanaki Nations access federal

self-determination programs and funding that, in other parts of Indian Country, have created thousands of jobs and generated hundreds of millions of dollars in goods and services. Allowing the Wabanaki Nations to fully participate in these opportunities would strengthen rural economies in some of the most economically challenged parts of our state.

LD 395 is a practical, reasonable, and long-overdue step to correct these inequities and to honor the Wabanaki Nations as partners in Maine's future. By passing this bill, the Legislature can help ensure that the Wabanaki Nations have access to the same tools, resources, and opportunities that every other federally recognized tribe in the country can use to strengthen their communities.

Doing so will benefit not only the Wabanaki but the entire state; economically, environmentally, and morally.

I respectfully urge you to vote Ought to Pass on LD 395. Thank you for your time and for your consideration of this important legislation.