

Betsy Williams  
Brunswick  
LD 785

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Betsy Williams, I live in Brunswick and I am writing in support of LD 785.

As a Unitarian Universalist I believe the wrongs of the past must be addressed with a commitment to restoring right relationships with love and respect for human dignity. Passage of LD 785 is essential to restoring our relationship with our Wabanaki tribes.

Sixty years ago, the government of Maine forced the Wabanakis to give up their children so they would assimilate into our white culture. The utter failure of that inhumane effort brought untold pain to generations of individuals, families and tribes. Most Mainers today, including myself, look back on that policy with feelings of shame and regret.

White ruling class Mainers at that time were guilty of forcing change on a people with the intent that they would eventually disappear as a viable political and cultural sub-group of our state. Our own 2012 Tribal-State Commission report found implementation of the Settlement Act of 1980 “created structural inequities that have resulted in conditions that have risen to the level of human rights violations.”

Let us not go down the path we did sixty years ago and someday look back with shame and regret that we missed an opportunity to change the trajectory of our relationship with our tribal neighbors from a fear-based and controlling one, to one that is based on trust, respect, and mutual interdependence.

In 2022 Governor Mills thwarted the Legislature’s attempt to grant the Wabanaki tribes of Maine the sovereignty they deserve. Now you have another chance; a chance to show our children and grandchildren a path forward that is filled with respect and compromise, not endless posturing and litigation. I urge you to pass LD 785, the first crucial step on the path of reconciliation and mutual understanding. Thank you.