

Testimony of the Wabanaki Alliance in support of
LD 25 An Act to Provide Indigenous Peoples Free Access to State Parks
Presented for the Public Hearing Before the Maine Legislature's
Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
January 25, 2023

Sen. Ingwersen, Rep. Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry; my name is John Dieffenbacher-Krall. I reside in Old Town, and I am the Executive Director of the [Wabanaki Alliance](#). The group was founded in June 2020 by the five federally recognized nations in what we today call the State of Maine, the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, Mi'kmaq Nation, Passamaquoddy Tribe at Motahkmikuk, Passamaquoddy Tribe at Sipayik, and Penobscot Nation. The Wabanaki Alliance was created to educate the people of Maine about the need for securing the sovereignty of Wabanaki Nations.

The Wabanaki Alliance supports LD 25 An Act to Provide Indigenous Peoples Free Access to State Parks. We thank Sen. Hickman for introducing the bill and the multiple legislators who have co-sponsored the bill.

Before European arrival in what we today recognize as the State of Maine all of the current Pine Tree State's territory was Wabanaki land. The Wabanaki Alliance perceives this bill as recognizing that historical reality and in some small but meaningful way having Maine State Government acknowledge the Wabanaki connection to creation, in this context state-owned parks or historic sites managed by the State. Honoring the Wabanaki connection to creation, to all of the Wabanaki's relations, signifies Maine State Government's respect for the Wabanaki worldview and the unique connection that the Wabanaki have to this place called Maine.

The displacement of Wabanaki Peoples and theft of Wabanaki land involves far more than an economic loss. It separated the Wabanaki from what they view as their relations, all of creation, with a duty to defend and to protect it. LD 25 represents an aspect of the growing land back movement to recognize the Wabanaki connection to the land and for settler governments and institutions to take meaningful steps to restore Wabanaki access and stewardship to traditional Wabanaki territory.

The State of Maine would not be the first settler government in the United States to take the step of providing free Indigenous access to public parks. Indigenous people have enjoyed free access to National Parks by showing their tribal ID. Two years ago, Minnesota passed a law granting to the citizens of the 11 federally recognized tribal nations residing within the boundary of that state free access to its state parks.

The State of Maine owes much to the Wabanaki. Passage of LD 25 would represent another discrete but important step in acknowledging Wabanaki Peoples as the Original Peoples of this land. The Wabanaki Alliance urges the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to vote ought to pass on this bill.