

**Testimony in Support of LD 294: An Act to Include a Tribal Member in the Baxter State Park Authority
Sponsored by Representative Benjamin Collins**

**Submitted by Maulian Dana, Penobscot Nation Tribal Ambassador and President of the Board of
Directors for the Wabanaki Alliance**

February 13, 2023

Senator Ingwerson, Representative Plueker, and members of the Committee On Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry,

My name is Maulian Dana, Penobscot Nation Tribal Ambassador, and I am testifying in support of LD 294 on behalf of the Penobscot Nation and the Wabanaki Alliance where I serve as the President of the Board of Directors. Thank you for the opportunity to share with you today. We are grateful for the support from longtime friend of the tribal nations Representative Collins as well as the co-sponsors and others advocating for this important bill.

Over the last few years we have seen tribal state relations make a lot of progress. Good progress. We have some work to do still to have all aspects of our sovereignty recognized and understood but we have come a long way. Part of that progress has been efforts to increase collaboration between the state and tribal nations and have seats on various boards and commissions for tribal citizens. I see this bill as another step in the right direction and following this trend. The Baxter State Park Authority is a very natural fit for Indigenous wisdom, life experience, stewardship mindset, and the sacred responsibility that we feel when making decisions in our homeland.

Katahdin comes from our language and means “big or great mountain”. The name likely has just as much to do with the spiritual significance of the mountain as the size. Our legends have taught us for generations since time immemorial that Katahdin is a sacred place where we pray, gather, and nourish our connections to our ancestors and relatives. I have known my whole life that Katahdin is our homeland and returning there often is a key part of how I actively take pride and comfort in my identity as a Penobscot person. My father was so moved by his connection to Katahdin that he started an annual spiritual prayer journey called the Katahdin 100 in 1980. This event has happened each year since and it has become a yearly ceremony for our people. After an adjustment period, in recent years, we have been able to work well with Baxter State Park for this purpose and I am excited that this bill has the potential to deepen that relationship and make our sacred place more accessible to tribal citizens more than once a year.

I know there is resistance to changing ways of doing things especially when figures like Governor Baxter have a strong and deeply rooted legacy and vision. I respect the work of Governor Baxter. I also view the connections that my people have to this place as just as significant and just as worthy and valid as any other Mainer no matter the title or position of power, if not more so. There is perhaps some inherent conflict in colonial ways of doing things that disrupted the ancestral ways of my people and us being involved in the systems created to keep us out. I acknowledge that and I also think that today we are all mostly doing our best and working with the systems we have been handed. Why not bring together like minds and unique perspectives when making decisions or planning for the future of a place we all love just the same? I urge unity and healing when it comes to this sacred place and I urge you to vote ought to pass. I am happy to take questions and I thank you for your time.

