

Saturday, May 14, 2022

Press contacts:

Deb Paredes - 903-617-0652

Luke Sekera-Flanders - 207-951-2172

We are youth leaders, representing a wide variety of identities, backgrounds, organizations and communities. We represent youth in the movements for social, economic, and environmental justice. What unites us in this moment is our frustration with the Democratic Party leadership.

From the establishment of the State of Maine in 1820, the state's relationship with the Wabanaki Tribes has been one of subjugation. One act of violence followed another as Indigenous people were removed from their ancestral homelands, poisoned by industrial pollution, stripped of basic necessities and stolen from their families. The State of Maine has treated Wabanaki peoples as wards of the state rather than human beings in sovereign nations. Through the 1980 Settlement Act, the state further inserted itself into tribal affairs and created a separate legal framework for the Wabanaki Nations, denying them access to resources and recognition of their inherent sovereignty. This has continued through the state's [legal pursuit](#) to claim ownership of and assert jurisdiction over tribal waters in the Penobscot River.

LD 1626, An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act, [was an opportunity to elevate the Wabanaki Nations](#) to having the same status and rights as the other 570 federally recognized tribes in the U.S.

The bill was the product of four years of negotiations between the state and the Wabanaki Nations, and had popular, bipartisan support. However, Governor Janet Mills made it clear that she opposes Tribal sovereignty. This was just the latest of the Governor's long pattern of undermining Tribal rights. From 2013 to 2018, she led the State's theft of the Penobscot River as Attorney General, and intervened in a [case](#) in Washington State against the tribes of that area. The Democrats had the power to see this bill through, but Mills did everything in her power to ensure that LD 1626 [did not reach her desk](#), and many legislative leaders fell in line.

Democratic leaders did not respect the tribes nor represent future generations when making the decision to kill LD 1626. We were watching, and we see you. We also see that 80% of the world's biodiversity is protected by Indigenous peoples, who comprise 5% of the world's population, to the benefit of us all. As upcoming leaders in the next generation, we are acutely aware of the interplaying impacts of climate change,

environmental destruction, social injustice and economic disparity on our daily lives and futures. We understand that it would be shameful for us to advocate for environmental, social or economic justice without supporting the Tribes and pushing for Indigenous sovereignty.

The party's decision is also a clear indication of their corporate purse strings, in what is poised to become the [most expensive](#) governor's race in Maine history.

Furthermore, the Democratic Party betrayed Indigenous people while choosing to ignore their own [party platform](#), which states: "We believe we must honor and uphold our sacred obligation to the Native Americans who first inhabited this land and that the sovereignty and self-determination of all indigenous tribes in Maine should be recognized and respected." LDs 906 and 585, while important steps toward justice for the Tribes, were [neither designed nor accepted](#) as replacements for the recognition of Tribal Sovereignty. We will watch to ensure that Tribal Sovereignty not only remains on the party platform, but that they begin honoring their sacred obligation through action.

We hope that, moving forward, you will join us in solidarity with Wabanaki leadership, and use your voice and networks to see this historic effort through.

Signed,

Deb Paredes - Maine Environmental Education Association, The Nature Conservancy

Cole Cochran - Legislative Director, Maine Youth Action

Kosisochukwu Ifeji - JustME for JustUS Youth Engagement Coordinator/NBEC Climate Education Working Group Co-Chair

Anna Siegel - Campaigns Director, Maine Youth Action, Core Member, Maine Youth for Climate Justice

Luke Sekera-Flanders - Community Water Justice, Maine Environmental Education Association Changemakers Fellow

Elise Hartill - Admin and Comms Coordinator for Maine Youth for Climate Justice, NBEC Climate Education and Local Outdoor Learning Advocacy Working Group Member

Madison Sheppard - Maine Youth For Climate Justice Core Member

Idey Abdi - Color of Climate & Maine Environmental Education Association

Ania Wright - Youth Representative to the Maine Climate Council, Sierra Club Maine Chapter

Ezra Sassaman – Advocacy and Organizing Coordinator, Maine Youth for Climate Justice

Cassie Cain - Maine Youth for Climate Justice Program Director

Thea Hart - Board Steward, Center for an Ecology-Based Economy

Maine Youth Power Core team - **Thea Sweet**,
Sylvie Fenderson, **Page Waldo**, **Jane Dawson**,
Jordyn Miller and **Phoebe Dolan**

Amara Ifeji and **Negina Lowe** - Maine
Environmental Education Association

Jess Falero - Maine People's Housing Coalition,
Church of Safe Injection

Anthony Jackson - Equity & Organizing
Coordinator, Nature Based Education Consortium