



State of Maine
Office of the Public Advocate
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Janet T. Mills
GOVERNOR

William S. Harwood
PUBLIC ADVOCATE

December 31, 2024

Re: Office of the Public Advocate Tribal Collaboration Report

Dear Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology,

This report is submitted pursuant to 5 M.R.S. §11055(2), which requires the Office of the Public Advocate (OPA) to file biennial reports with this Committee describing our implementation of the Tribal-State Implementation Act.

Background:

In 2022, representatives of the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, the Passamaquoddy Tribe, the Penobscot Nation, and the Governor's Office negotiated the terms of legislation intended to expand economic opportunities for, and improve the welfare of, the Wabanaki Nations and their citizens, and to make structural changes in certain state agency decision-making to promote government-to-government dialogue with the Wabanaki Nations. Among the provisions of that legislation, enacted as Public Law 2021, c. 681, is one which establishes in law a Tribal-State collaboration process designed to promote meaningful communication on issues of particular significance to the Tribes and their citizens.

The Tribal-State Collaboration Act:

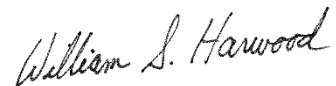
The Tribal-State Collaboration Act, 5 M.R.S. §11051 *et seq.*, requires 15 agencies identified in the statute to engage in a Tribal collaboration process regarding contemplated programs, rules, or services that substantially and uniquely affect Maine's four federally recognized Tribes or their citizens. It is intended to be a user-friendly process free from unnecessary bureaucracy that will be implemented within existing resources.

Title 5 M.R.S. §11053(1) requires each agency covered by the statute to adopt a collaboration policy. The OPA adopted its policy, appended to this report, on January 4, 2023. The Office's Tribal liaison, as required by 5 M.R.S. §11053(3), is Sylvia Most, who can be reached at 207-458-9462 or Sylvia.J.Most@maine.gov. On November 21, 2024, the Governor's Office provided training on how to implement the statute in a manner that promotes effective communication and positive government-to-government relations with the Tribes. The Governor's Office has also requested that the Maine Indian Tribal State Commission (MITSC) help to facilitate training of state agency Tribal liaisons on issues of cultural competency, and MITSC has agreed to do so. We look forward to that training as soon as it can be arranged.

The OPA does not currently offer programs, rules, or services subject to this Act, however we are pleased to have a Tribal Representative serving as a standing member of the Electric Ratepayer Advisory Council.

We have no recommendations for changes to the statute at this time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William S. Harwood". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "William" and last name "Harwood" clearly legible.

William S. Harwood
Public Advocate

CC:

Jill Tompkins, Maine Indian Tribal-State Commission
Jerry Reid, Office of the Governor

Enc: OPA Tribal Collaboration Policy