

Myke Johnson  
Portland  
LD 2004

My name is Rev. Dr. Myke Johnson and I am a retired minister living in Portland. I'm writing in support of LD 2004: An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations.

The Wabanaki nations in Maine are treated differently than the other 570 federally recognized nations across the country. Because of the 1980 Settlement Act, when Congress passes federal legislation for tribes nationwide the tribes in Maine must be explicitly written into the legislation unlike the other federally recognized tribes. This is an excessive burden to the tribes. They do not have the resources to track all federal legislation and lobby Congress to have them included in each piece of legislation. When I think of this burden I contemplate a hypothetical situation if my town had to be written into every piece of legislation passed at the Maine legislature. I live in Portland and my State Senator and State Representative are Jill Dusen and Grayson Lookner. With nearly 3,000 pieces of legislation being considered just this legislative session my legislators would never be able to include my town in each one. They're be running around frantically to each committee or try putting an amendment on each bill that reaches the floor. But that is what we're asking the tribes in Maine to do at Congress.

Suffolk University published a report in 2019 highlighting the federal beneficial Indian laws passed by Congress since the Settlement Act was implemented in 1980. They found approximately 151 federal laws have been passed that the tribes in Maine do not have access to. Many of these laws would not only benefit the tribes but the surrounding rural areas. A Harvard report last year documented that this has stunted the self-determination and economic vitality of Wabanaki nations.

Taking legislation on a case by case basis can take years, even decades. For example, in 2013 the Violence Against Woman's Act was finally amended to include Native American women. However, the tribes in Maine were not included. Maine finally passed legislation mirroring the federal law to include the tribes in Maine in 2020. Why should it take seven years for the tribes in Maine to protect their tribal members from domestic violence?

This legislation doesn't circumvent the 1980's Settlement Act. This legislation changes a provision in the Settlement Act that would at least begin the process of placing the tribes in Maine on the same footing as the other 570 federally recognized tribes. Please support LD 2004 to start putting the tribes and rural Maine on a path to prosperity.