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Committee on Indian Relations of the Episcopal Diocese of Maine  
LD 2004

Testimony of the Committee on Indian Relations of the Episcopal Diocese of Maine  
In Support of LD 2004 An Act to Restore Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations

Submitted for the Public Hearing Before the Maine Legislature's Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, May 31, 2023

Sen. Carney, Rep. Moonen, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, my name is John Maddaus, and I serve as chair of the Legislative Committee of the Committee on Indian Relations of the Episcopal Diocese of Maine. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of LD 2004 An Act to Restore Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations.

The Episcopal Committee on Indian Relations was formed by resolution of the Diocesan Convention in 1991. For over 30 years, we have lived into our mission "to deepen our relationship with the Wabanaki of Maine, to stand with the tribes in the pursuit of justice, to affirm their inherent sovereignty, and to support the preservation of Native languages and culture."

On October 22, 2022, the 203rd annual convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Maine reaffirmed its commitment to the sovereignty of the Wabanaki nations located within the State of Maine by passing overwhelmingly Resolution #1. Resolution #1 (1) "urges the 131st Maine Legislature to pass a bill or bills in a form consistent with the goal of tribal sovereignty and the recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act, and urges the Governor to sign this bill(s) when they reach their desk;" (2) "urges the members of the Maine Congressional delegation to sponsor, the U.S. Congress to pass, and the President to sign legislation ensuring that the tribes located in Maine are covered by federal Indian legislation without the necessity to state that they are covered in each law that is enacted," and (3) "continues to support the Mi'kmaq Nation as they pursue the process they deem most appropriate to achieve redress of the Aroostook Band of Micmacs Settlement."

At the time of the passage of this Diocesan resolution, there was legislation pending in Congress, H.R. 6707 An Act to Advance Equality for Wabanaki Nations, which passed in the U.S. House of Representatives. In the rush to final adjournment of Congress last December, H.R. 6707 did not pass in the U.S. Senate. One of the arguments used against passage of H.R. 6707 was that it did not have the support of the State of Maine. Passage of LD 2004 would demonstrate beyond reasonable doubt that amending the Settlement Acts of 1980 does, indeed, have the support of the State of Maine!

LD 2004 seeks to achieve the same primary goal as H.R. 6707, to remove state barriers to the application of federal laws benefiting Indigenous nations to the Wabanaki nations of Maine. As of 2019, a report by Suffolk University identified 151 federal laws to benefit Indigenous nations that the Wabanaki Nations did not have access to. As demonstrated by a report by Harvard University in 2022, the inability to access these laws stunted the economic development of the Wabanaki nations, and also of the surrounding rural areas of Maine.

Diocesan Resolution #1 also includes support for the Mi'kmaq nation in their efforts to amend their separate Settlement Act. LD 2004 also includes provisions to address the terms of this subsequent Settlement Act.

The Committee on Indian Relations has voted unanimously to support LD 2004, to accomplish the goals set forth in 2022 Diocesan Convention Resolution #1.

We urge you to vote "Ought to Pass" on LD 2004, and thank you for your consideration of our testimony.