



MAINE AFL-CIO

A Union of Unions Standing for Maine Workers

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Testimony of Maine AFL-CIO Legislative & Political Director, Adam Goode, to Support L.D. 2004, "An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations"

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, my name is Adam Goode. I'm the Legislative and Political Director of the Maine AFL-CIO. We represent 40,000 working people in the state of Maine. We work to improve the lives and working conditions of our members and all working people. We testify in support of LD 2004.

As with the many other non-native organizations testifying in support of LD 2004, our primary support of this Tribal Sovereignty effort comes from shared values of social justice, equity and fairness. We join with Indigenous tribes, who lived in this region for thousands of years prior to European colonization, in their fight for rights as sovereign nations to be recognized.

For too long, Indigenous tribes in Maine have lived under an unfair contract that has prevented them from accessing the same benefits the federal government provides to the other 570 federally recognized tribes across the country.¹ Now is the time to reset our relationship with Indigenous tribes and provide fairness and equity by treating them like their federally-recognized peers.

The Maine AFL-CIO is committed to supporting policies that build worker power and dismantle structural and institutional racism. We are working to integrate anti-racism education and racial justice within our organization because racism harms union members of color, day in and day out. Time and time again, we have seen that the way to win big improvements in working conditions is to tackle issues that divide us. Race has divided the working class since Maine was colonized by Europeans.

Our Executive Board strongly endorsed LD 1626, the Tribal Sovereignty bill in the 130th Legislature, upon learning that any piece of federal legislation does not apply to Indigenous tribes in Maine unless they are specifically mentioned by name. Tribes in Maine are left out of 151 pieces of law, covering taxing authority, fish and game, land use, natural resources, trust land acquisition and criminal jurisdiction. This exclusion stifles the voice of our neighbors and negatively impacts the way they live life.

The result of federal legislation not applying to Indigenous tribes in Maine is a scenario where tribes have to lobby Congress to be specifically included in any piece of federal legislation benefiting tribes in the United States. Tribes in Maine are small and it is absolutely unrealistic to expect tribes to be able to lobby Congress to be included in every piece of federal legislation that improves life for tribes in the other 49 states.

A union is the way for working people to negotiate and enforce a contract at their workplace. Such contracts, known as Collective Bargaining Agreements, are regularly updated to reflect the ways that the workplace and society change. Thanks to Collective Bargaining Agreements, workers have a document that is regularly negotiated, protects workers from discrimination and provides a pathway to a fair and equitable workplace for thousands of Mainers, especially veterans, workers in rural Maine and black and brown Mainers.

¹<http://legislature.maine.gov/doc/3636>

We view the need to update the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act of 1980 as similar to the need to update a contract between a group of workers and their employer. All working people benefit when we stand by our co-workers. We stand by our tribal neighbors because we know that Maine tribes do not enjoy the same rights, privileges, powers and immunities as other federally recognized Indian tribes. When our neighbors prosper, we all prosper.

Many of the laws which have passed that the tribes lack access to would benefit both the tribes and surrounding rural areas. With the tribes not being able to access various federal funding their self-determination and economic vitality have been stunted. While our support for LD 2004 is fundamentally rooted in Tribal Sovereignty, we also support the bill because tribes accessing federal beneficial laws will benefit rural Maine as a whole. Many of our affiliate unions have deep ties to small communities in rural Maine. Papermakers who work at mills in rural Maine, construction workers who work in the building trades and state employees who plow the roads are just a few examples of union workers who predominantly live in rural Maine and whose communities will benefit from tribes having full access to federal laws.

The many positive changes put forward in this bill will result in big improvements for tribes, be it in the form of requesting FEMA funds for federal disasters, deciding civil actions between Indians and non-Indians including contract disputes and family law matters or basic self-governance options that non-native people in Maine take for granted, like being able to generate tax revenue from transactions that happen in our state and local jurisdictions or administering fish and game ordinances.

After more than 40 years, Maine should reevaluate our relationship with the tribes to examine what works and what doesn't. It doesn't make sense to prevent Maine tribes from benefiting from federal legislation that helps other tribes in the United States.

We do not stand by when a fellow brother or sister is left out of the fruits of their labor. We join in supporting this bill because we cannot stand by while our neighbors are left out of benefits that tribes in 49 other states enjoy. Union members enjoy true democracy in the workplace, where every worker has a voice. Our support of this bill is based on extending that principle, so all of our neighbors can enjoy the right to have their voice heard.

We urge you to support LD 2004.