

Karen Benoit
South Berwick
LD 2007

To: Sen. Carney, Rep. Moonen, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on
Judiciary

From: Karen Benoit, 14 Berwick Road, South Berwick, Maine 03908,

Re: Support for LD 2007, An Act to Advance Self-determination for Wabanaki
Nations

Sen. Carney, Rep. Moonen and members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is
Karen Benoit and I live in the town of South Berwick. I am submitting this letter in
support of LD 2007.

I first became aware of the unfair treatment of the Wabanaki Nation through a very
moving, interactive program they did at the South Berwick Library. About a year after
that program, I became actively involved with representatives of the Cowasuck Band
of the Pennacook Abenaki People in New Hampshire to create a land
acknowledgement that is now used in the South Berwick library and was the
inspiration for other organizations in South Berwick. This activity has made me
keenly aware of the tragic history of the indigenous community at the hands of
colonizers and their resourcefulness.

LD 2007 provides the opportunity to address problems with the law that prevent the
Wabanaki Nations in Maine from exercising their inherent right to self govern, as all
other federally recognized tribes in the United States are able to do under Federal
Indian Law.

Research! shows that the tribes' lack of self-governance has resulted in lagging
economic growth for Wabanaki nations as well as their surrounding communities.
While a 30-year boom is happening elsewhere in Indian Country, with tribal nations
powering personal income growth of 61% on average, the Wabanaki nations are stark
underperformers with just 9% growth. Beyond income, the lag also represents
thousands of lost jobs, millions of dollars in lost tax revenue, and loss of opportunity
for both tribal and non-tribal citizens.

These economic restrictions have hit children the hardest. According to the U.S.
Census data in 2019, childhood poverty rates within Wabanaki communities range
from a low of 40% at the Passamaquoddy Tribe at Motahkomikuk community to a
high of 77% for the Mi'kmaq Nation in Aroostook County. By comparison, Maine's
childhood poverty rate for the same period is 15%.

By modernizing MICSAs, Harvard researchers say the Wabanaki Nations could
become the economic engines of their regions, creating new opportunities for jobs and
income growth for themselves and rural Maine. According to the recent Harvard
Report, self-government for the tribes would likely mean an additional \$330 million a
year in Maine's Gross Domestic Product, more than 2,700 jobs, and \$39 million a
year in state and local tax revenue. Based on the experience of other tribes, better than
half the new jobs created are likely to be filled by neighbors of Wabanaki tribes in
rural Maine.

Thank you, Sen. Carney, Rep. Moonen and members of the Judiciary Committee. I
hope that you will vote YES on LD 2007 to address the economic opportunity that
could lift the Wabanaki nation and the surrounding neighbors.

Sincerely,
Karen Benoit
14 Berwick Road
South Berwick, Maine 03908