

Michael Herz, Ph.D.
Damariscotta
LD 2007

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

From: Michael Herz,, Ph.D., 29 Water St., Damariscotta, Maine; Past Chair, Friends of the Earth, U.S.

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

Intro: Sen. Carney, Rep. Moonen and members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Michael Herz and I live in Damariscotta. I am testifying in support of LD 2007 on behalf of Friends of the Earth, U.S.

Testimony: The Wabanaki are called Maine's First Nations, if for no other reason than that they were here first, well before many of those other self-righteous Americans who have long stood in the way of fair and equal treatment of indigenous people!

It's way beyond time to remove the barriers that have blocked the Wabanaki, along with their neighbors in rural Maine, from achieving the dramatic and sustained economic growth achieved over the past 40 years by 570 federal tribes across Indian Country. We should be easing the Settlement Act's restrictions that will enable the Wabanaki Nations to take full advantage of federal self-determination policies that are very clearly benefiting America's other tribes.

Income growth since 1989 has been 61% for tribal citizens outside of Maine, but only 9% for Wabanaki citizens in Maine; Overall income growth for Mainers over the same period was 25%. Likewise, because of the Settlement Act, the Wabanaki tribes' health, educational and economic outcomes have lagged far behind those of other population groups in Maine and other tribes throughout the country.

Kids have been hit the hardest by these economic restrictions.

U.S. Census data in 2019 indicate that 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. In contrast, the poverty rate for other Maine children for the same period is 15%.

Maine's thriving fish, forests and wildlife and healthy waters didn't just happen. The Wabanaki have been protecting the environment and maintaining sustainable ecological practices for millennia, since long before European settlement of Maine and, because it's their heritage, will continue doing it for the duration!

The Wabanaki are not alone in seeking sovereignty. Thousands of Mainers stand in support of their self-determination. Sixteen hundred Mainers from all corners of the state testified in record numbers in favor of passing a tribal sovereignty bill based on consensus recommendations made by a legislative task force four years ago. Environmental organizations, social justice organizations, organized labor, and faith-based groups continue to voice strong support on behalf of tens of thousands of their members. Over 250 businesses and organizations have joined the Wabanaki Alliance Tribal Coalition — including the newly formed “Businesses for Wabanaki Sovereignty,” a forum for businesses around the state supporting the inherent sovereignty of the Wabanaki Nations.

Closing: Thank you Joint Judiciary Committee members and please remember that our Wabanaki fellow citizens need your help to achieve the full sovereignty held by America's other tribes.