

Public Testimony on LD2007: In support of Wabanaki Self-Determination

LD 2007: *An Act to Advance Self-determination for Wabanaki Nations* is all about fairness and equity for the Wabanaki nations and all of Maine. Due to restrictions imposed by the 1980 *Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act* (MICSA), the Wabanaki Nations have been kept from achieving the significant economic growth experienced by the other 570 federal tribes over the past 40 years who've had full access to federal policies of self-determination. Removing those obstacles would help the Wabanaki Nations take advantage of federal self-determination policies, programs and funding that elsewhere in Indian Country led to the creation of thousands of jobs and hundreds of millions of dollars in goods and services produced by Native businesses.

Let's face it, Maine is falling behind in this respect: Outside of Maine, there's a 30-year economic boom going on in Indian Country. Easing the Settlement Act's restrictions will enable the Wabanaki Nations to take full advantage of federal self-determination policies that are very clearly benefiting 570 other tribes and nearby communities across the country. The average income growth [since 1989 has been 61% for tribal citizens not located in Maine, but only 9% for Wabanaki citizens in Maine; Maine's overall income growth for 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.

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%. This level of poverty is unacceptable for the greatest nation in the world, especially for the native communities that have safeguarded the land we call home for thousands of years.

We owe the beauty of places like Baxter State Park and Acadia National Park to the Wabanaki tribes who have watched over these places for millenia. It's time we show them our appreciation. Maine's wild and scenic beauty - [the kind that rakes in over \\$8.5 billion for the state's tourism industry every single year](#) - did not happen by accident, so let's stop pretending it did.

We Mainers strive to create a community of caring, and it's time for us to extend that care to *all* Mainers. It's time to support An Act to Advance Self-Determination for Wabanaki Nations.

Thank you,
Nola Prevost