

Mary Griffith
Freeport
LD 2007

I am writing in support of LD 2007. I think it's time that the State of Maine acknowledges Wabanakis' right to have more control over their lives.

Wabanaki peoples have endured hardships for centuries, from loss of their land, to being treated as wards of the state, with little control over their remaining lands and their trust funds. They endured discrimination, diseases, poverty, and didn't have the right to vote in Maine elections until 1967. There were efforts to assimilate them. They were forbidden in school to use their languages, many of the children were sent to boarding schools, and later many children were forced unfairly into foster care away from their communities. All of this and more has resulted in generational trauma.

The recent report by the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development describes how tribes across the country have benefitted economically when they control their own economic development. Dr. Kalt, a coauthor, explains that the key to the remarkable economic success in Native communities across the U.S. is because tribes are most familiar with their needs and know best how to work with tribal and local employees. The economic benefits spill over into surrounding non-Native communities.

Provisions of the 1980 Maine Indian Land Claims Settlement Act have prevented Wabanakis from benefitting from most of the laws and regulations passed by Congress for the benefit of Native peoples since 1980. The federal government has experience working with more than 500 Native nations and can assist them in addressing their needs.

The Maine Legislature, by passing LD 2007 can put Wabanakis on a more equal footing with other Native nations. By addressing living standards and self determination this would also be taking a step toward healing generational trauma and its effects in the communities.