

To: Senator Carney, Representative Moonen and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary
From: Jennifer Melville (1 Cove Road, Freeport ME 04032)
Re: Support for LD 2007, An Act to Advance Self-determination for Wabanaki Nations
Date: February 23, 2024

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen and members of the Judiciary Committee, please accept this testimony in full support of LD 2007, An Act to Advance Self-Determination for Wabanaki Nations. This long overdue legislation is essential to ensure that Wabanaki people in Maine are treated fairly and justly. LD 2007 will modernize the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act (MICSA), enabling Wabanaki people and communities to thrive and prosper.

For over 10,000 years, Wabanaki have skillfully cared for the land and waters we all call home. As a long-time land conservation professional, I see firsthand how Wabanaki land managers meld western science and Indigenous knowledge to foster healthy forests and rivers. In this time of an uncertain climate and degradation of our waters and air we have much to learn from this sound stewardship. But until the legislature acts to enable tribes in Maine to regain their sovereign rights, Wabanaki will remain unable to reach their full potential. And when the Wabanaki are deprived of their rights, all of us who depend on and love the land and waters of Maine are also harmed.

Unlike the other 570 federally recognized Tribes in the nation, Maine's Tribes are unable to exercise their inherent and legal rights to self-govern. Provisions of MICSA deprive the Wabanaki of many federal benefits and laws that pertain to all other federal Tribes. Sadly, Maine government has fought to block Wabanaki access to many of the federal laws that would greatly benefit them. And when Wabanaki communities' economic and cultural prosperity are thwarted, all Mainers, especially nearby rural communities, are affected negatively. LD 2007 will go a long way in rectifying this wrong. The bill will implement many of the 22 consensus recommendations – including ones pertaining to lands and waters - of a 2020 bipartisan task force that convened to update MICSA.

I can't urge you strongly enough to ensure passage of LD 2007. With successful enactment of this bill, all Maine people – as well as the Wabanaki - will benefit and Maine will be back on the road to justice and fairness. Thank you for accepting my testimony and for all your efforts on behalf of Maine's people.