

Tom Van Buren
Deer Isle, St. Brendan the Navigator Episcopal Church
LD 2007

Dear Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Tom Van Buren and I live in Deer Isle. I am a retired arts and culture producer with a doctorate in cultural anthropology, and a member of the Racial Justice Council of the Episcopal Diocese of Maine. I am writing to you in support of LD 2007 on behalf of Saint Brendan the Navigator Episcopal Church, which has in 2023 endorsed the campaign for Wabanaki Sovereignty in Maine. I have been a member of their social outreach ministry since 2018.

Following the Episcopal Diocese of Maine, which voted with near unanimity at its 2020 convention, we at St. Brendan the Navigator recognizes the historical wrongs done to the first peoples of Maine, from colonial era bounty hunting, land seizures, pollution of their lands and waterways to the removal of their children. The Indian Claims Settlement Act of 1980, which relegated Maine's four tribes to a status far below that of all 570 other federally recognized tribes, perpetuates their mistreatment. Because of the Act, they have been excluded from the benefits from 150 pieces of Federal Indian legislation enacted since 1980, and must defer to the state of Maine on matters that tribes throughout the United States take into their own hands, from education to healthcare, environmental conservation, tribal courts and administration of justice to economic development. On average the 570 tribes' economies have grown by 61% since 1980, while that of Maine's tribes have only grown by 9% over that period.

I urge you to support LD2007 because it is the right thing to do, because it will save the State Maine money by not fighting the tribes at every turn, and because it will bring employment and investment benefits to all the tribal communities, and also to their neighbors, especially those in northern rural Maine who sorely need it. Over 250 organizations and business of Maine as well as many thousands of voters are on support Wabanaki sovereignty. In 2023, substantial majorities of your colleagues voted in favor of a similar bill. Please send this bill to the Sate Assembly and Senate with a resounding vote of support from the Judiciary Committee.