

Dear Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Jeff Bates and I live in Yarmouth. I was born and raised in Maine and am currently raising twin daughters. I am writing to testify in support of LD 2007.

I am lucky to live in Maine. Mainers have a unique brand of pragmatism, a down-to-earth quality, and a kindness and welcoming spirit without being too showy or over the top about it. Importantly, we don't simply do things the way they have always been done, or the way everyone else does it. If something needs fixing, we fix it in a way that works best for us, give a curt nod, and move on to the next thing. There are many examples of this attitude. We decided traditional two-party voting rules didn't work for us, so we introduced rank choice voting. We understand the need to be good environmental stewards and the benefits of energy independence, so we set aggressive emission reduction goals and introduced laws that allow Mainers to benefit from solar. We have an aging population, so we welcome hardworking people from abroad and help them build a life here. These things make me proud to be raising my daughters here.

It is because I know these attitudes and values are at the core of who we are that I am so baffled at our politicians' unwillingness to be flexible or pragmatic on the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act. Clinging to the letter of that law benefits no one, while Wabanaki sovereignty benefits both the Wabanaki tribes and the surrounding communities. If no one benefits from the status quo, why aren't we adopting a Mainer attitude and changing it?

LD 2007 is also a matter of fairness. Like most people, I need to do more to educate myself on the history of Maine and our relationship to the Wabanaki tribes. Even with my limited knowledge, I know there are wrongs that need to be righted. Many of those wrongs may have occurred in the distant past, from our perspective, but it falls to us to right them. Fairness is a very basic, fundamental human principle. My daughters understand it well. I hope I can soon give them another example of how the state they are growing up in stood by its values and did what was right.

The Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act is not working for Mainers, and it is not working for the Wabanaki Tribes. It is time we rolled up our sleeves and fixed it. With LD 2007 passed, we could step back, acknowledge a job well done, and address the other work that awaits us.

Thank you for considering my testimony. I hope you will advance this important initiative.