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LD 2007

With this written testimony, as a citizen in the town of Gorham, and as an historian specializing in the History of Maine, I strongly urge the Maine Legislature to pass LD 2007: An Act to Advance Self-determination for Wabanaki Nations.

It is time for the state of Maine to fully and legally recognize that Maine's four federally recognized tribes are inherently sovereign nations; they have been in the land we now call Maine since time immemorial, long before European settlers arrived, thousands of years before Maine became a state in 1820. This fact is an essential point in why it is well past time for the restrictions imposed by the 1980 Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act (MICSA), to be lifted.

As you are undoubtedly aware, there are currently 574 federally recognized tribal nations within the United States. It is important to remember that these 574 tribes include the four Wabanaki Nations in Maine. The full significance of Federal recognition means that the US government acknowledges tribes as sovereign governments, as well as its own "trust responsibility" to protect tribal land rights and natural resources, preserve tribal sovereignty and self-governance, and carry out legal mandates of federal Indian law. It is only in the state of Maine, and nowhere else, where the legal mandates of federal Indian law do not fully apply. 570 sovereign tribes across the United States benefit from federal Indian law—each and every tribe EXCEPT the four Wabanaki tribes. It is time to right this wrong, not just for the sake of the tribes, but for all who call this land home.

While tribal sovereignty is recognized in the US Constitution, it's really only since the 1970s that the federal government began to take steps to support, not undermine, tribal self-governance. This shift came to fruition at the same time sovereign authority was being stripped from the Wabanaki Nations through the Settlement Acts.

The full restoration of self-governance and the inherent rights of sovereign nations throughout the United States for the past fifty years has been of critical importance for tribes all over Indian Country, resulting in an economic resurgence in many areas, and improved access to healthcare, education. But here in Maine, since 1980, Wabanaki Nations have been left behind, unable to access the full benefits of their sovereign status.

You have an opportunity today to restore a far more equitable reality for the Wabanaki. This bill will ensure the tribes can access the full economic, environmental, educational, and health benefits available to **\*\*every other\*\*** federally recognized tribe. The state of Maine and her people have far more to gain than to lose with the passage of this law, including, but not limited to economic benefits. But more importantly, this is the morally right path to take. And, for the first time since MICSA in 1980, the vast majority of Mainers know and understand this essential fact: when the Wabanaki thrive, we all thrive.

As an individual citizen, I lose nothing with the passage of this law. MICSA was a broken deal from the start, but as a living document, it can and should be revised and modernized. The passage of this bill will go a long way towards repairing broken relationships between the state and the four Wabanaki tribes. After hundreds of years of removal, land dispossession, broken treaties, cultural genocide, and neglect—this is the literal least we can do to begin to be in right relationship with one another.

Thank you.