

To: Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary

From: Martha Bentley, 960 Lewiston Rd, West Gardiner, ME 04345; owner of MMB Collaborative Leadership LLC

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, my name is Martha Bentley and I live in West Gardiner. I am writing in support of LD 2007. I have worked as an economic and entrepreneurial development professional in Maine since 2002, first with Maine Technology Institute and then as the small business development manager, small business ombudsman, and Director of Economic Development Coordination for the Maine Department of Economic and Community Development. I can unequivocally say, based on my professional expertise and experience in rural economic development, not passing LD 2007 is the State of Maine cutting off our nose to spite our face. Our rural economies are in crisis and there is clear and rigorous data-based research evidence from the Harvard Kennedy School of Public Policy's the Project on Indigenous Governance and Development that self-government for the tribes is estimated to raise an additional \$330 million a year for Maine's gross domestic product, add more than 2,700 jobs, and contribute \$39 million a year in state and local tax revenue. In addition, if one looks at top employers in Maine's most rural counties, you will find that they are predominantly non-profit organizations and non-locally owned businesses. Non-locally owned businesses do create jobs, ***but the wealth from success is not accrued locally but to the owners and investors who live elsewhere.*** Self-government means ownership and decision making is local and allows for wealth to be created locally.

While LD 2007 is also an issue of justice and fairness, it is simply smart economic policy.

Outside of Maine, strong economic growth is happening around gaming ***and non-gaming*** Indian reservations. The Wabanaki and their non-native neighbors (us!) are excluded from this growth. The continued resistance to giving Maine's tribes the same sovereign rights as other tribes in our country when the economic logic of it is so strong, strikes me as either a holdover of the paternal policies of the past or due to the arguments of a strong lobby by non-Native and also not locally

owned economic interests. I hope that neither of these is the case as both potential logics are deeply flawed. All of Maine benefits from allowing our native neighbors to have the sovereign rights they are owed. In closing, I would like to thank the committee members for their close consideration of this bill and encourage you to stand on the right side of history by righting this historic wrong.