

Testimony in support of LD 2007, *An Act to Advance Self-determination for Wabanaki Nations*

To: Sen. Carney, Rep. Moonen, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary

From: Brian Hinrichs, 46 Norway Rd, Bangor, ME 04401 on behalf of Friends of Katahdin Woods & Waters, 184 Houlton St, Patten, ME 04765

February 25, 2024

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

My name is Brian Hinrichs and I live in Bangor. I am writing on behalf of Friends of Katahdin Woods & Waters, based in Patten, an organization for which I serve as executive director. I am writing to testify in support of LD 2007.

Restoring tribal self governance is of critical importance to the health and vitality of the Wabanaki nations and all communities in Maine, including those we serve in Penobscot County, Aroostook County, and throughout the Katahdin region.

Due to restrictions imposed by the *1980 Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act (MICSA)*, the Wabanaki Nations have been kept from achieving the significant economic growth experienced by the other 570 federal tribes over the past 40 years who've had full access to federal policies of self-determination. Removing those obstacles would help the Wabanaki Nations take advantage of federal self-determination policies, programs and funding that elsewhere in Indian Country led to the creation of thousands of jobs and hundreds of millions of dollars in goods and services produced by Native businesses.

Already, against significant odds, we have seen Wabanaki businesses, artists, individuals, and communities thrive and play a significant role in regional tourism and industry. By modernizing MICSA, Harvard researchers say the Wabanaki Nations could become the economic engines of their regions, creating new opportunities for jobs and income growth for themselves and rural Maine. According to the recent Harvard Report, self-government for the tribes would likely mean an additional \$330 million a year in Maine's Gross Domestic Product, more than 2,700 jobs, and \$39 million a year in state and local tax revenue. Based on the experience of other tribes, better than half the new jobs created are likely to be filled by neighbors of Wabanaki tribes in rural Maine.

At Friends of Katahdin Woods & Waters, we have been grateful for deep partnerships built on trust in establishing Tekakapimək Contact Station in Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument, which will open to the public this summer. Based on these deep partnerships and the learning we have undergone to bring them to life, we understand now more than ever how critical sovereignty is not only to economic health, but to the physical and mental health of tribal citizens. According to the U.S. Census data in 2019, childhood poverty rates within Wabanaki communities range from a low of 40% at the Passamaquoddy Tribe at Motahkomikuk community to a high of 77% for the Mi'kmaq Nation in Aroostook County. By comparison, Maine's childhood poverty rate for the same period is 15%.

The Wabanaki nations are the original stewards of the land we now call Maine. Maine's wild and scenic beauty didn't happen by accident; Wabanaki peoples have kept it this way, and will continue to do so, for the benefit of all. We are deeply grateful for their contributions to the continued health of this land that we are now honored to co-steward with them for the enjoyment of all.

It's time to remove the barriers that have kept the Wabanaki, along with our neighbors and community partners in rural Maine, from achieving the dramatic and sustained economic growth achieved over the past 40 years by 570 federal tribes across Indian Country. Friends of Katahdin Woods & Waters and proud to stand with 1600 Mainers and over 250 organizations across the state to support the passing of LD 2007 now.

Thank you sincerely for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Brian Hinrichs, on behalf of Friends of Katahdin Woods & Waters