

Ann Harris
Camden
LD 2007

I am writing in strong support of LD 2007, which would address a colossal miscarriage of justice in the historical treatment and current civil rights of the Wabanaki peoples. My stand is on moral grounds because this bill is the right and principled thing to do.

The state of Maine must stand for justice, fairness, equity, and principle. No nation or state can thrive on a foundation of theft, injustice, denial of rights, imposition, and neglect. The Wabanaki people must have the right to self-governance held by almost all U.S. tribes.

The passage of this bill will add substance to the countless declarations of acknowledgement by Maine businesses that they conduct their business on lands once belonging to the Wabanaki. These statements, seen on so many public websites and in brochures, are a nice sentiment, but increasingly they ring hollow. They provide no meat nor bread. Without real justice, they become empty words -- or hypocrisy -- which is not an image the state or its businesses should project.

The passage of the bill will also add substance to our purported commitment to advance the interests of our citizens, particularly the disenfranchised, people of color, people historically overlooked, people in need, the hungry, children.

It would serve the desperate needs of the environment as well, for Native peoples are well known and respected for their reverence and care for the nature they consider sacred, they have an outstanding record of environmental effort, and the Wabanaki tribes are known for forging effective partnerships in the interest of land- and-water stewardship.

I feel this state is at a crossroads. We have always been a place of wealthy visitors and less affluent residents. But over the past few years, Mainers' ability to live here and to be housed with any dignity has been seriously strained and curtailed by the sky-high costs and low availability of real estate and rentals. At the same time, a huge percentage of available housing sits vacant most of the year or is rented out to non-Mainers. This inequitable situation is now nothing short of obscene and promises disaster ahead as the population continues to flee or to age.

I would also note that many of those moving into the state right now are doing so specifically because of the inclusive and humane reputation Maine has gained over the past few decades, as many other states are retreating into more reactionary, hate-based fortress mentalities. We need to continue to uphold our record of open-minded fairness, inclusivity, and welcome to all.

We cannot begin to redress the injustices of hundreds of years of history when it comes to the indigenous people of Maine, but this bill serves notice that the state of Maine acknowledges and cares about that history and respects the true Maine Natives, their indigenous neighbors. It will serve as a humane foundation upon which we can build better and better lives for the Wabanaki people and for all Mainers in the coming years.