

# Testimony in support of LD 2007: An Act to Advance Self-Determination for Wabanaki Nations

February 25, 2024

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

Over the past couple of decades, and especially over the past several years, I have been on a journey of learning, self-reflection, and understanding, seeking to confront my own white privilege and the places of racism within myself and within the broader society.

This journey of self-discovery and repentance has included a newfound understanding — still in process! — of the ways in which my formative experiences have reinforced a colonizing mindset. That is, I confess that in almost entirely unconscious ways, I hold a mindset that is dominated by a bias toward White Western perspectives — that too easily dismisses that which is not like me, including indigenous perspectives and values. Although I know there is much more work ahead, I am actively seeking to decolonize my mind — to acknowledge the ways in which white supremacy and institutionalized racism have occupied my mind and influenced my behaviors — and to earnestly pursue racial justice and equity.

Passage of LD 2007, An Act to Advance Self-Determination for Wabanaki Nations, is an important step toward decolonizing. It is preposterous that the Maine State Legislature and our State Governor have the authority to either grant or withhold self-determination for the tribes who have been present on this Wabanaki land for thousands and thousands of years. This very idea — that the authority to grant or deny the right of self-determination belongs to those of us who are descendants of relatively recent European settlers / colonizers — serves as the perfect example of a colonizing mindset. We are the newcomers — we are the colonizers — and yet we claim ultimate authority over the land and its inhabitants. With or without LD 2007, the tribes who occupy this land that we call Maine *are* sovereign; this is their birthright. Passing this bill into law would only acknowledge what is fundamentally true. Passing this bill into law would serve to right a longstanding, egregious wrong.

You know the reasons why this is important — how the 1980 Settlement Act had unintended consequences that have long disadvantaged our indigenous neighbors. You know that our Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, Mi'kmaq, and Maliseet siblings are merely asking to be treated like the other 570 federally recognized tribes. You know that the tribes only wish to be able to determine their communities' futures, and to receive the benefit of a number of federal laws designed to assist and support tribal health, safety, well-being, and right to self-governance — rights provided by law to all other federally recognized tribes. You know all of this. And you know the long history of bloodshed and violence and oppression — of domination and attempted genocide, of boarding schools designed to rob children of their identities, of stolen land and shattered lives and broken promises. Now is the time to act on what you know to be true. The very least we can do today, in repentance for the wrongs of our ancestors, is to remove the obstacles we have imposed and grant our tribal neighbors the provisions they are requesting, so that they are able to self-govern on their native lands without the state of Maine obstructing.

As a Christian and as a member of the clergy, my faith tells me that this is the morally right thing to do. My faith tells me that imposing barriers to self-determination, denying the dignity and sacred worth of our indigenous siblings, and pretending that tribal lands are municipalities *when they are not*, is morally and ethically wrong. Please listen to thousands of Mainers urging you to do the right thing: Pledge your support for LD 2007.

I am praying for you as you deliberate.



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