

Maya Faulstich
Maine Youth for Climate Justice
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Dear honorable members of the Judiciary Committee,

We talk about Maine, this beautiful place of oceans and forests and rivers and fish. And we are proud to be Mainers because here you can boat, and hike, and ski. This beautiful landscape and outdoors have been protected and maintained by the Wabanaki people for thousands of years. Yet we have not uplifted our Wabanaki people. Instead, we have oppressed them. In 1980, the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act was enacted in Maine, and today it is still preventing the Wabanaki People from enjoying the economic growth that 570 federal tribes are experiencing today because of their self-determination. The Settlement Act was meant to be temporary and is described as a living document, to be changed along with society. Indigenous tribes across the nation are being uplifted, and Maine is falling behind. To demonstrate the economic disparity between the average Mainer and the average Wabanaki Nation member: income growth since 1989 for tribal citizens not located in Maine is at 61%, but for Wabanaki citizens in Maine it's only 9%. During this same time period, Maine's overall income has grown 25%. As Maine citizens, the Wabanaki people have been left behind. With self-determination, they could economically benefit greatly. Overall child poverty in Maine is at 15%. The lowest childhood poverty rate in the Wabanaki Nation is in the Passamaquoddy Tribe, at 40%. The highest is in the Mi'kmaq Nation at a whopping 77%. If the Wabanaki people had self-determination, they could rise out of this poverty. They could have access to policies, programs, and funding that could create more jobs, goods, and services for Indigenous people. And not just the Wabanaki Nation would benefit from this decision. According to the Wabanaki Alliance, Maine would gain \$330 million a year in GDP, \$39 million a year in local tax revenue, and 2,700 jobs. Changing and modernizing the Settlement Act will not only benefit the Wabanaki Nation, it would also benefit all Mainers, especially rural communities.

The time has come to listen to the voices of the people who have protected and inhabited our land for ages. The time has come for us to step up and uplift the Wabanaki People rather than restrict and oppress them. To progress as a state, we need to work with the Wabanaki Nation rather than against them and grant them self-determination.

Sincerely,
Maya Faulstich
Maine Youth for Climate Justice
Yarmouth, ME