

**Testimony before the  
Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary  
From Bryan Wentzell, Portland, Maine 04101  
February 26, 2024**

**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:

My name is Bryan Wentzell. I have been working in land conservation in Maine for 20 years and recently helped launch a new sustainable timber investment fund for western Maine. For the past 6 years I have been deeply involved in the First Light effort to better connect Maine's conservation community with Wabanaki Tribes through learning, access, and land return. I write today to support **LD 2007 "An Act to Advance Self-determination for Wabanaki Nations."**

It has been my privilege to work with many Wabanaki leaders - both elected officials and dynamic young leaders from across Tribal communities. They are not just Wabanaki leaders – they are grad students, researchers, scientists, foresters, executive directors, musicians, language keepers, historians, land stewards, artists, anthropologists, registered Maine Guides, friends, and neighbors. I am asking you, the committee and this legislature to pass this bill and help unlock the potential of these and future Wabanaki leaders and communities which will benefit us all.

After 40 years of experience, it is clear that the Settlement Act as an anomalous experiment in State-Tribal relations has not worked and must be changed to fall in line with tribal self-governance that exists for the 570 other federally-recognized Tribal Nations. Around the country states and local governments have overwhelmingly gained from the community and economic benefits of local tribal sovereignty. This is documented in detail for all to see in the recent report from Harvard University

What more, history tells us the story of the political and economic vice that was applied to the Settlement negotiations in the late 1970's, which did a disservice to the outcome and in hindsight is completely inconsistent with the values of Maine people today. We have a chance now to do right by and for all Mainers including Wabanaki People.

Thank you very much for considering my comments.

Sincerely,

Bryan Wentzell

Portland, Maine