

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: Laura Hepner, Waldo, Maine

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Laura Hepner and I live in Waldo on the unceded land of the Wabanaki. I am 16 and a current high school student. I am writing to testify in support of LD 2007.

Restricted by aspects of the *1980 Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act*, the Wabanaki Nations in Maine have not had access to the right of sovereignty and the opportunities provided to the other 570 federally recognised tribes. This has limited their economic opportunity, greatly impacting their wellbeing. The average income growth since 1989 has been 61% for tribal citizens located in the U.S. excluding Maine, but only 9% for Wabanaki citizens in Maine. This bill would be an essential step to ensuring equality for the Wabanaki.

This issue is important to me as a young person in Maine, because my peers (Wabanaki and non-Indigenous) and I depend on the sustainability and equity of this state and our communities. The Wabanaki have been stewards and protectors of the natural environment since long before European colonization. They hold this knowledge about living on this land that is essential for all of us in building a sustainable future in Maine, and facing climate change, which will have an outsized effect on youth. The ability of the Wabanaki to be leaders in this time depends on their access to their right to an improved way of life through sovereignty.

Passing LD 2007 is about fairness and equity for the Wabanaki Nations, and ensuring that they have the same opportunities as the other 570 federally recognised tribes. I stand with the Wabanaki in support of their self-determination, and urge you to do so as well by passing LD 2007.

Please vote “ought to pass” on LD 2007.

Thank you for your time,

Laura Hepner

Laura Hepner
Waldo
LD 2007

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