

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

My name is Barbara Acosta. I am a resident of Trenton and chair of the Peace and Social Action Ministry of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Ellsworth. Our congregation is a member of the Wabanaki Alliance Tribal Coalition, and our ministry is united in support of the passage of LD 2007, a bill to restore the Wabanaki Nations' inherent rights to self-determination. I am also one of the 500 members of the Maine UU State Advocacy Network (MUUSAN), which links Maine's 26 UU congregations in working for legislation that embodies those values. MUUSAN is testifying separately as an organization in support of this bill.

As Unitarian Universalists, we acknowledge that the Wabanaki people occupied this land we call Maine for over twelve thousand years, long before European settlers arrived. They cared for its rivers, lakes and forests in ways that we would do well to honor and emulate. We also recognize that the ancestors of many of us committed grave atrocities against the Wabanaki people that continue to reverberate even today. Rather than falling into shame or denial, our faith calls us to make reparations. One way to do this is by supporting sovereignty, not only to repair the wrongs of the past, but to build a future together of mutual respect, healing, and self determination.

We wonder why similar bills have not passed in previous legislative sessions. LD 2007, like previous iterations, incorporates the recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act. The task force is bipartisan and includes all of the chiefs. It was tasked by the legislature to study the problems with the 1980 Settlement Act and to make a set of recommendations to address those issues. The recommendations, now incorporated into this bill, were supported by a consensus of all task force members. Passing this legislation will bring not only improved tribal relations, but greater wellbeing for all Mainers.

What were the reasons for not passing previous sovereignty legislation until now? What concerns could supercede the well-researched and painstakingly negotiated elements of LD 2007? We wonder if some of our political leaders fear that if Wabanaki sovereignty were acknowledged, that it would somehow diminish the rights of the rest of us. But recognizing the humanity and self-determination of others does not mean diminishing our own. The Wabanaki are not asking Mainers to give up the land on which our homes sit, nor to block Mainers from using the rivers, nor any of the other unconscionable acts Mainers have perpetrated on the Wabanaki. They are simply asking to restore the inherent right of the Wabanaki Nations in Maine to self-govern within their respective territories in accordance with the same federal laws that generally govern tribal lands elsewhere in the United States.

It is well past time to right the wrongs of the past, and to support, rather than undermine, the restoration of tribal self-governance. The members of our Peace and Social Action Ministry strongly urge you to vote Ought to Pass on LD 2007.

Thank you.