

February 25, 2024

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Scott Klinger and I live at 60 Pleasant St. Gardiner, Maine 04345.

My testimony today is offered as enthusiastic support for LD 2007, An Act to Advance Self-determination for Wabanaki Nations.

My wife and I moved to Maine in 2020. In the preceding 60 years I have lived and worked in Native American, Native Alaskan, First Nation and Aboriginal communities in the United States, Canada, and Australia.

I have seen firsthand, how respect for Indigenous rights have freed the wisdom, creativity, and deep ecological knowledge of Indigenous Peoples to improve their tribal economies, and to restore and protect their land and culture. These contributions have delivered ancillary benefits for non-tribal members living in border towns and beyond.

While Indigenous Peoples face discrimination in all settler/colonial nations, in nowhere that I have lived are Indigenous Peoples denied basic sovereignty as they are in the State of Maine.

Maine leads our nation in so many arenas, but in terms of State – Tribal relations, we rank dead last. As a Maine resident, it is embarrassing and shameful. I have told my friends who advocate for Indigenous rights in their states about state-tribal relations in Maine, they insist I must have it wrong, insisting that all tribal members, have full federal rights. They are shocked to learn that the flaws in the 1980 Settlement Act deny the four tribes of Maine, the same rights as the other 570 tribes in the United States.

Some Maine political leaders of the settler government insist that the 1980 Settlement Act is settled law, but it was always meant to be a living document, subject to revision to accommodate new conditions and past flaws.

This refusal to revisit the issue of Wabanaki sovereignty hurts all Mainers, tribal members and members of the settler communities alike. Throughout the US, tribal economies are growing, creating jobs and wealth for tribal members, and economic opportunities for settler families in border towns in beyond. Maine's recalcitrance on the issue instead produces poverty, especially for Wabanaki children. Maine's blemished record on protecting all children is even more shameful when it comes to Wabanaki kids. A powerful first step in addressing this disgrace is to respect Wabanaki sovereignty and allow the Wabanaki nations to develop resources and to provide opportunities for their future generations.

Maine's tribes were sovereign for 13,000 years before the first settlers arrived in the 1700s. Maine is a beautiful state and we have the Wabanaki and their ancestors to thank for that. It was the our settler ancestors that fouled our rivers and polluted our land with every sort of chemicals, including the pervasive PFAS. Since Maine's tribes have assumed shared responsibilities for some of the waterways on their land, the health of those waters and land has improved.

There's one thing that has struck me since moving to Maine. It is the incredible love that the Wabanaki people have shown to those who oppose their rights. They have every reason to be angry and destructive, but instead they find their power in love. They've created a powerful community of supporters among Maine businesses, churches and others from the settler community. They created a powerful model for fighting for their rights, one that I deeply appreciate, and I hope you do too.

I hope your committee will recognize the broad bi-partisan support of Mainers for Wabanaki Sovereignty and do your part to make LD 2007 a new law, that will allow our Wabanaki neighbors to thrive and which will bring Maine in line with every other state.

Sincerely,

Scott Klinger

Scott Klinger
Gardiner, ME
LD 2007

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