

Susan Payne
Cape Elizabeth
LD 2007

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

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of LD 2007, An Act to Advance Self-Determination for Wabanaki Nations.

My name is Susan Payne. I live at 72 Stonybrook Rd., Cape Elizabeth 04107.

My grand mother was an enrolled member of the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma, so I grew up with a personal awareness of how the culture and livelihood of our indigenous peoples have been damaged and at times destroyed. Traditional Native American ways of life were taken away from the Tribes, causing widespread poverty and few avenues for economic development and well-being.

In the last half century, tribal nations across the country have made significant gains in reclaiming their sovereignty and exercising their right to self-government on their own lands. Since the 1960s, the federal government has increasingly recognized and promoted tribal sovereignty and engaged in a government-to-government relationship with tribes.

However, the Maine settlement act explicitly exempted Maine tribes from any laws passed by Congress for the benefit of Indian tribes after 1980. This means that while the more than 500 other federally recognized tribes can take advantage of the policies and services conferred through more than 100 federal laws passed since 1980, such as the Federal Tribal Law and Order Act of 2010, Maine tribes have been left out or forced to access them through the state. The 1980 Settlement Implementing Act put the Wabanaki tribes in a category separate from all other federally-recognized tribes in the U.S. and has stifled the Tribes' right to self determination, causing both cultural and economic hardship.

The proposed legislation is based on recommendations from a bipartisan task force convened by the Maine legislature and has wide public support. I believe this is not an instance of our state granting rights, but rather restoring rights long due to the tribes. The Wabanaki tribes deserve the rights, privileges, powers, duties and immunities ascribed to all other federally recognized Indian tribes.

As a member of The First Parish in Portland, Maine, Unitarian Universalist Church, I am motivated by my faith's principles of justice, equity, and compassion in all human relations and the inherent worth and dignity of every person. I hold that LD 2007 is the just and equitable thing to do. I believe passage of LD 2007 is a moral imperative to begin to restore the Wabanaki people's sovereignty and right to self determination, as well as for the State of Maine to provide equity amongst all tribes.

I urge you to vote to support LD 2007. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Susan Payne