

Malvina Gregory  
Portland  
LD 2007

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: Malvina Gregory, Portland ME 04013

Dear Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Malvina Gregory and I live in Portland. I was born in Bangor, Maine, and I grew up in Eddington along the Penobscot river. I am writing to testify in support of LD 2007.

I grew up skipping stones and dabbling my toes in the Penobscot river, just a few miles from Indian Island. I canoed its waters, and we found charred remains of Penobscot firepits and arrowheads in our yard as we dug our gardens. Like many Mainers, throughout my childhood I proudly cited the great-great grandmother who was of the Penobscot nation and a member of our family by marriage. I remember the discussion around (but didn't really understand the significance of) the 1980 Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act. I went to high school with teens who had grown up on the Penobscot reservation. In so many ways the Penobscot people, their lands, their waters, and their ways colored my childhood.

It wasn't until my early 20s that I learned our state's historical legacy, and how much the tribes had lost their sovereignty. I learned how we had polluted their waters to the point that their traditional foods were dangerous to eat. I learned how generations had lived in poverty, and I was humbled to realize that I was complicit in the silence that never questioned why our neighbors on Indian Island had so little, how we all had looked the other way. I learned how many opportunities and sovereignty had been taken away. I thought back to my friends from high school, sent up a silent apology, and pledged to do better.

It is quite simply unfair that our Wabanaki tribes do not have the same legal footing as other tribes across our nation. Due to restrictions imposed by the 1980 Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act (MICSA), the Wabanaki Nations have been kept from achieving the significant economic growth experienced by the other 570 federal tribes over the past 40 years who've had full access to federal policies of self-determination. Removing those obstacles would help the Wabanaki Nations take advantage of federal self-determination policies, programs and funding that elsewhere in Indian Country led to the creation of thousands of jobs and hundreds of millions of dollars in goods and services produced by Native businesses. This is not only good for the tribes, this is good for the rural regions that surround them.

It's a simple, powerful truth. When you learn that something unjust has happened, you work to repair what you can. You also listen to those harmed to see what will be effective. You trust that they will know best what they need. In true Maine tradition, I'm pledging to do right by my neighbors. I am listening to the tribes, honoring the heritage that shaped by childhood and the state that I love. The tribes are telling us that what they need is the power to make decisions for themselves, with their own jurisdictions, laws, and self-governance. They ask for passage of LD 2007. I urge you to support them; I certainly do.