

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

From: Dr. Robin Russel, 7 St. Louis Ave. Hermon, Maine 04401; and Dr. Sandy Butler, 743 Forest Ave. Orono, Maine 04473. We are both professors at the School of Social Work, University of Maine

Re: Support for LD 2007, An Act to Advance Self-Determination for Wabanaki Nations

Date: February 26, 2024

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, thank you for allowing us to contribute this testimony to your deliberations on LD 2007.

We are Robin Russel and Sandy Butler, professors at the University of Maine School of Social Work, and residents of Hermon and Orono, respectively. We are submitting testimony in support of LD 2007, “An Act to Advance Self-Determination for Wabanaki Nations”. This bill is sponsored by Maine House Speaker, Rachel Talbot Ross and co-sponsored by more than 100 legislators.

Social workers in the US have an ethical obligation to advocate for equal rights and social and economic justice for vulnerable and oppressed populations. All accredited academic social work programs in the US must educate their students about the history of oppression in this country and their ethical obligation to work toward remedying these conditions. We do educate our students about the history of colonization, broken treaties, and genocide against indigenous populations, including those residing in Maine. Our tribes’ properties were taken, treaties with the state broken, and tribal people experienced the cultural genocide of having their children taken and sent to Indian Schools, like the infamous school in Carlisle PA., and white foster homes.

LD 2007 would grant Maine’s Passamaquoddy Tribe, the Penobscot Nation, the Mi’kmaq Nation, and the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians the same rights to self-governance within their lands that 570 federally recognized tribes already enjoy in every other state. There have been 150 federal laws passed since 1980 that Maine tribes have not benefited from due to the 1980 Implementing Act; this is wrong, and LD 2007 will work to reverse that inequity. Wabanaki Nations have not been able to benefit from the 30-year economic boom experienced by other tribes across the country who have had access to federal policies of self-determination. This is shameful and Maine needs to rectify this injustice.

We share with our students the numerous instances when our state has been ahead of others in advancing and protecting the rights of oppressed and vulnerable people. We’ve expanded

Mainecare, raised the minimum wage, adopted marriage equality, and protected victims of domestic violence and human trafficking before many other states. But, in this one area of the rights of indigenous nations, we are the only state that has prevented our tribes from the rights and benefits provided by the federal government.

In 2019, the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act, composed of tribal leaders and legislators and state officials from both parties, held hearings for 6 months to develop a list of suggestions that LD 2007 proposes to implement. These recommendations will restore tribal self-governance which is long overdue and the right thing to do. Similar legislation received strong support in the Legislature in 2022 and 2023, but has been blocked by Governor Mills' opposition; that opposition needs to be overcome this year.

Thank you, Senator Carney and Representative Moonen and honorable members of the Judiciary Committee for your time and attention to this very important piece of legislation. We ask you to vote in favor of LD 2007.