

**To: Sen. Carney
Rep. Moonen
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary**

**From: Andrew H. Deci
5 Arbor Ave
Topsham, Maine 04086**

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

I urge you to support the passage of LD 2007, "An Act to Advance Self Determination for Wabanaki Nations" and to provide our indigenous community members with the recognition and equity they have been promised and denied for generations.

Unfortunately, the disparity between indigenous life in Maine, indigenous life in recognized tribes, and Maine life generally is objectively clear. Almost all indicators of life expectancy, economic prosperity, and other key social determinants demonstrate significant inequity. This inequity is born from our colonialist and capitalist roots, enhanced by the overt and continued takings from native communities over hundreds of years, and the on-going lack of acknowledgement of previously signed treaties and agreements between the sovereign nations.

Easing the Settlement Act's restrictions will enable the Wabanaki Nations to take full advantage of federal self-determination policies that are very clearly benefiting 570 other tribes and nearby communities across the country. The average income growth since 1989 has been 61% for tribal citizens not located in Maine, but only 9% for Wabanaki citizens in Maine; Maine's overall income growth for the same period was 25%. Likewise, because of the Settlement Act, the Wabanaki tribes' health, educational and economic outcomes have lagged far behind those of other population groups in Maine and other tribes throughout the country.

This legislation represents a crucial step toward acknowledging and rectifying the historical injustices faced by the Wabanaki Nations. It seeks to affirm their inherent sovereignty and self-determination, a right that is both overdue and fundamental to the principles of justice and equity. Recognizing the Wabanaki Nations' right to self-governance is not only a matter of restoring political and social autonomy; it is also about reestablishing their ancestral stewardship of the land, which has been proven time and again to be deeply sustainable and respectful of the natural world.

Researchers estimate that restoring self-governance capabilities for the Wabanaki Nations would result in the direct and indirect addition of more than 2,700 new jobs – 85% of which would be gained by the tribes' neighbors in rural Maine. It would also add an estimated \$330 million each year to Maine's gross domestic product, with the benefits of this growth concentrated in rural and economically deprived portions of Aroostook, Penobscot, and Washington counties.

Beyond the social implications of this bill, restoring the right to self-govern in Maine has specific legal value to the Tribes:

- The right to exercise criminal jurisdiction over all categories of crimes committed by Native Americans on tribal lands.
- The right to legislate and adjudicate civil regulatory issues arising on tribal lands, such as the right to enact and enforce environmental quality controls or to regulate on-reservation businesses.
- The right to levy and collect taxes.
- The right to conduct gaming in collaboration with state and local governments.
- The right to be immune from lawsuits by private individuals and state governments.

- The right to acquire reservation and trust lands without the consent of local and state governments.

In conclusion, "An Act to Advance Self-Determination for Wabanaki Nations" is not merely a legislative measure; it is a statement of our values as a society and a commitment to righting historical wrongs. It represents a step toward healing, respect for sovereignty and cultural heritage, and a shared commitment to the stewardship of our environment.

I strongly urge you to support this act, recognizing the immense benefits it holds for the Wabanaki Nations, for environmental conservation, and for the cultural and moral integrity of Maine. It's time to remove the barriers that have kept the Wabanaki, along with their neighbors in rural Maine, from achieving the dramatic and sustained economic growth achieved over the past 40 years by 570 federal tribes across Indian Country.