

## Women for Healthy Rural Living

**To:** Sen. Moore, Rep. Strout, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary

**From:** Lizzie Cunningham, 304 Milbridge Road, Cherryfield, 04622, Women for Healthy Rural Living

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

Sen. Moore, Rep. Strout, and members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Lizzie Cunningham and I live in Cherryfield. I am testifying on behalf of Women for Healthy Rural Living (WHRL), a nonprofit in Milbridge. I am here to testify in support of LD 2007, An Act to Advance Self-Determination for Wabanaki Nations.

Our mission at Women for Healthy Rural Living is to advance and promote the health and well-being of the woman, her family, her community, and the planet. Our vision is a more just community where all women are empowered to achieve optimum wellness—physical, emotional, social, and spiritual wellness.

As a woman and family-centered nonprofit, we cannot look away from the fact that economic restrictions as a result of MICSAs have hit children the hardest. According to the U.S. Census data in 2019, childhood poverty rates within Wabanaki communities range from a low of 40% at the Passamaquoddy Tribe at Motahkomikuk community to a high of 77% for the Mi'kmaq Nation in Aroostook County. By comparison, Maine's childhood poverty rate for the same period is 15%.

Our county is home to two tribal reservations, and we understand that when the Wabanaki thrive, rural Maine thrives. By modernizing MICSAs, Harvard researchers say the Wabanaki Nations could become the economic engines of their regions, creating new opportunities for jobs and income growth for themselves and rural Maine. Based on the experience of other tribes, better than half the new jobs created are likely to be filled by neighbors of Wabanaki tribes in rural Maine. Rural Washington County is a challenging place to live, and we believe that it is imperative to the health of our wider community that we strive for more equitable policies in the State's relationship to the Wabanaki.

Moreover, we believe that the health of our environment is central to our community's health. The rugged beauty of our county and state is central to who we are as Mainers.

The Wabanaki have been protecting the environment and maintaining sustainable ecological practices for millennia, long before European settlement of Maine. They will continue to do so; it's their heritage and birthright as Wabanaki peoples. We believe our community will thrive by building up and following the example of the native peoples of Maine.

Sen. Moore, Rep. Strout, and members of the Judiciary Committee, I would like to thank you for your time and attention to these very serious issues. I and my organization, Women for Healthy Rural Living, firmly support LD 2007. We believe that restoring the Wabanaki Nations' inherent rights to self-determination is central to a healthier, more equitable Maine community.