



SUIT UP MAINE

February 25, 2024

Sen. Carney, Rep. Moonen, and honorable members of the Committee on Judiciary:

We offer this testimony in support of LD 2007, “An Act to Advance Self-determination for Wabanaki Nations” on behalf of Suit Up Maine, an independent, all-volunteer constituent action group representing thousands of Mainers in all 16 counties.

Maine’s government has a long history of breaking promises to the Wabanaki people, resulting in deeply ingrained generational trauma that remains to this day. We applaud the efforts of Maine legislators to remain open to remedies that restore good faith and trust between parties. The bipartisan Task Force on Changes to the Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act performed a critical role in this effort by highlighting long-standing causes of friction and making recommendations to address them, based on mutual agreement and benefit.

For more than four decades, the state and the courts have used language in the settlement to treat the tribes as municipalities, depriving them of inherent sovereignty they never ceded to the state. Under the settlement, tribes in Maine have been unable to benefit from more than 150 federal laws passed since 1980, missing out on opportunities for economic development, increased access to health care, expanded environmental protections, enhanced K-12 education, and legislation that fostered job creation, ensured safe drinking water, and strengthened laws regarding prevention and prosecution of sexual assault and domestic violence. We agree with tribal leaders, who argue that the act is a “failed experiment,” and with a 2012 report from the Maine Indian Tribal-State Commission, which found that the settlement “created structural inequities that have resulted in conditions that have risen to the level of human rights violations.”

We also take note of data presented to the Legislature in March 2023 from the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, now the Project on Indigenous Governance and Development at the Harvard Kennedy School. The report details a 30-year economic boom in Indian Country — everywhere except in Maine. Here, personal income of Wabanaki citizens has increased just 9% since 1989, compared to a 61% rise for tribal citizens outside Maine and a 25% growth rate statewide. The report puts the blame for this difference squarely at the feet of the Settlement Acts and notes that if the Legislature takes long-overdue steps to modernize the 1980 agreement, the Wabanaki Nations could be “economic engines” for rural Maine. Passage of LD 2007 could boost Maine’s gross domestic product by as much as \$330 million, bring in \$39 million annually in state and local tax revenue, and add more than 2,700 jobs — 85% of which would be gained by the tribes’ rural neighbors.

The importance of the work by the Task Force and the data in the Harvard Report cannot be understated. Similarly, the recommended changes to the Implementing Act included in LD 2007 are essential to demonstrating, in good faith, that Maine recognizes the Wabanaki Nations – the Passamaquoddy Tribe, Penobscot Nation, Mi'kmaq Nation, and Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians — as sovereign.

The Wabanaki people have waited long enough. We urge you to vote “Ought to Pass” on LD 2007.

Thank you.

Karin Leuthy
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Founder & Co-Leader

Kelli Whitlock Burton
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