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LD 2007

Please accept my written testimony in support of the Wabanaki Nations—LD 2007 is crucial for ensuring fairness and equity. Currently, restrictions imposed by the 1980 Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act (MICSA) have hindered the Wabanaki Nations from experiencing the economic prosperity enjoyed by 570 other federally recognized tribes. Unlike these tribes, the Wabanaki Nations have been unable to fully access federal policies of self-determination, which have led to substantial economic growth elsewhere in Indian Country.

Maine is falling behind as Indian Country experiences a 30-year economic boom. By easing the restrictions of the Settlement Act, the Wabanaki Nations can tap into federal self-determination policies, which have demonstrably benefited numerous tribes and nearby communities across the nation. However, due to MICSA, the economic growth of Wabanaki citizens in Maine has been severely limited, with income growth significantly lagging both national and state averages.

These economic restrictions have disproportionately affected children within Wabanaki communities, leading to alarmingly high poverty rates compared to the state average. By modernizing MICSA, the Wabanaki Nations have the potential to become economic drivers in their regions, generating new job opportunities and income growth for themselves and rural Maine.

The Settlement Act, originally intended as a "living document," has remained unchanged for over 40 years to the detriment of the Wabanaki and rural Maine communities. It's time to update this outdated agreement and forge a new era of partnership for the benefit of all in Maine.

The exclusionary language of MICSA since 1980 has led to uncertainty, litigation, and unnecessary delays for the Wabanaki Nations. It's essential to heed the calls for modernization and collaboration to avoid further squandering resources and foster positive relations between the state and tribal communities.

The Wabanaki's historical stewardship of the environment underscores their commitment to sustainable practices. By removing barriers to economic growth, we not only empower the Wabanaki but also honor their heritage and contribute to the well-being of rural Maine. It's time to ensure that the Wabanaki, alongside their neighbors, can partake in the nationwide Native American resurgence and contribute to Maine's continued prosperity.

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