

## **Testimony in Support of LD 2007, An Act to Advance Self-determination for Wabanaki Nations**

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

My name is Erika Arthur, a resident of the town of Freedom and Program Associate at the Portland-based nonprofit organization Atlantic Black Box (ABB). ABB is a proud member of the Wabanaki Alliance Tribal Coalition, a group of over 250 businesses and organizations representing many sectors and communities across the state, all of whom support the restoration of full sovereignty for the Wabanaki tribes. I am writing today to strongly urge you to vote “Ought to Pass” on LD 2007, An Act to Advance Self-determination for Wabanaki Nations.

At the heart of our organization’s work is historical research undertaken to illuminate the impact of past events on how we live together today. Once those impacts are understood, it is often difficult to find effective strategies for addressing the wrongs of the past. On the other hand, sometimes critical repair strategies are readily available and just require the will of leaders like you to put them in motion. Such is the case with the legislation before you today. It has become abundantly clear that the 1980 Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act (MICSA) has imposed detrimental limitations on the Wabanaki Nations over the past four decades. LD 2007 would dismantle those limitations and allow Wabanaki governments and communities to take advantage of myriad federal benefits that are long overdue to them.

Critically, passing LD 2007 is anything but a symbolic gesture. Research has shown that Wabanaki Nations have much to gain from a modernized MICSA. While Tribes across the U.S. have experienced marked economic growth in the past several decades, Wabanaki people have continued to experience economic stagnation and extremely high poverty rates, with children bearing the brunt of these hardships. The measures that LD 2007 proposes would give the Tribes essential tools for bringing Wabanaki children out of poverty. This is what all children deserve, regardless of whether they live in Scarborough or Sipayik.

As you may be aware, a [recent report](#) by researchers at the Harvard Kennedy School showed that tribal self-governance was likely to add \$330 million per year to Maine’s gross domestic product, more than 2,700 jobs, and \$39 million a year in state and local tax revenue. Notably, as we have seen elsewhere in the country, these benefits would not only reach tribal citizens, but neighboring communities as well, improving the lives of many rural Mainers at a time when we can use all the help we can get. Living in rural Waldo County, I understand that when good development happens in a nearby town, we all benefit. It is my firm belief that when the Wabanaki thrive, we all thrive.

Finally, at the most basic level, I appeal to you to support LD 2007 because as a student and scholar of history, I am aware that the Wabanaki have been making good and considered decisions about the lands, water, and people of this place for millennia and they will continue to do so, particularly if their energies are not spent fighting for their most basic rights.

Thank you for your time and leadership,  
Erika Arthur