



Testimony of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association
in support of
LD 2007 - *An Act to Advance Self-determination for Wabanaki Nations*

February 26, 2024

Good morning Senator Carney, Representative Moonen and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Heather Spalding and I am deputy director of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA). I am speaking today in support of LD 2007 - *An Act to Advance Self-determination for Wabanaki Nations*.

MOFGA is working to build a food system that is healthy and fair for all of us. Through education, training and advocacy, we are helping farmers thrive, making more local, organic food available and building sustainable communities. We acknowledge that modern agriculture is built on unceded traditional indigenous lands through human exploitation and co-opted knowledge. MOFGA strives to be explicit and transparent about how we are working towards our commitments to social justice. We believe in economic, environmental and social justice for all people involved in Maine's food system, including those most impacted by historic and present-day systemic oppression – white supremacy, colonization and extractive capitalism.

MOFGA recognizes the Wabanaki tribes – the Penobscot Nation, Passamaquoddy Tribe, Houlton Band of Maliseet, and Aroostook Band of Micmac, as well as the Abenaki and other tribal communities living in diaspora outside of Maine – as the first organic land stewards of the region. While agriculture originally represented a small part of indigenous foodways in the Northeast, the Wabanaki have derived their sustenance in harmony with nature and with respect and care for the soil and natural resources for 16,000 or more years.

LD 2007 is about fairness and equity. It would address the injustice of the 1980 Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act (MICSA), which has prevented full access to federal policies of self-determination that have helped 570 other tribes achieve significant economic growth. Tribal citizens across the United States have experienced income growth of 61% compared to only 9% for Wabanaki citizens – an astonishing comparison that ties directly to the Wabanaki's limited access to federal programs of support and development.¹ Childhood poverty among the Wabanaki communities is especially concerning - ranging 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%.²

The Wabanaki's ability to restore relationships with indigenous food systems is a fundamental aspect of sovereignty. For more than three decades MOFGA has worked with the Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance

¹ [Economic and Social Impacts of Restrictions on the Applicability of Federal Indian Policies to the Wabanaki Nations in Maine](#) (the Harvard Study). Kalt, Medford, Taylor. Harvard Kennedy School, Harvard University, Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation. December 2022.

² U.S. Census – 2019 as reported in the Harvard Study.



to host a Native American Arts and Education Area at the Common Ground Country Fair in order to promote a better understanding and appreciation of Maine Native people and culture through educational displays with historical references. Now we are engaging in many efforts to educate ourselves further about the injustices committed against the Wabanaki people since colonial settlement.

The Wabanaki Tribes in Maine are not asking for special treatment in their call for self-determination. They merely are seeking status comparable to the 570 other federally-recognized tribes in the United States. MICSA was not intended to be set in stone, rather it was conceived as a living document and it is time to modernize it.

We urge you to support LD 2007 and restore the tribes' inherent rights to self-governance. Maine's tribes must regain access and stewardship of ancestral lands as well as the rights to regulate hunting, fishing, natural resources, and land use on tribal lands, as allowed by federal law. Supporting tribal sovereignty is an essential first step on the road to healing and reconciliation for the harms inflicted upon the Wabanaki people. Thank you for your consideration of this legislation.

The Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA) started in 1971 and is the oldest and largest state organic organization in the country. We're a broad-based community that educates about and advocates for organic agriculture, illuminating its interdependence with a healthy environment, local food production, and thriving communities. We have 15,000 members, we certify more than 500 organic farms and processing facilities representing \$120 million in sales, and we are working hard to provide training and create opportunities for Maine's next generation of farmers. Each of these farmers is a Maine businessperson for whom economic health and environmental health are interdependent. While MOFGA envisions a future of healthy ecosystems, communities, people and economies sustained by the practices of organic agriculture, we attribute our success to collaboration and outreach to growers across the management spectrum.