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In support of LD 2007, An Act to Advance Self-determination for Wabanaki Nations  
March 26, 2024

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Melissa Hackett and I am a policy associate with the Maine Children's Alliance. We are a statewide, non-partisan advocacy organization whose mission is to promote sound public policies to improve the lives of Maine children, youth, and families.

I offer testimony on behalf of the Maine Children's Alliance in support of LD 2007, An Act to Advance Self-determination for Wabanaki Nations. We strongly support this effort to restore the inherent right of the Wabanaki Nations to self-governance in accordance with the same federal laws that generally govern the other 570 federally recognized tribes elsewhere in the United States. This right to self-governance ensures that a tribal community can determine what is in its own best interest and develop and best leverage social and economic policies according to the needs of their own citizens.

Without these rights, tribes in Maine have not had the authority or autonomy to manage their own resources, including their land, water, and economy. Because of the unintended consequences of the 1980 Settlement Act, tribes in Maine have not benefited from more than 150 federal laws passed since then. Without the agency to determine their own economic and cultural needs, the Wabanaki tribes' health, educational and economic outcomes have lagged far behind those of other population groups in Maine and other tribes throughout the country. And that lack of economic security has hit children the hardest. In 2019, U.S. Census Bureau data showed that childhood poverty rates within Wabanaki communities ranged 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 was 15%.

With sovereignty rights through this legislation, tribes will be able to achieve economic security and prosperity on their own terms, for themselves and for their children. For 40 years, state government and courts have used language in the settlement to restrict tribal rights granted to other federally recognized tribes. This legislation seeks to correct the wrongs created by the 1980 Settlement Act, and to establish a new relationship between Maine and the tribes, that will allow the Wabanaki Nations to thrive as the other 570 nationally recognized tribes across the United States have been able to do.

Finally, when the Wabanaki thrive, rural Maine also thrives. This legislation has the potential to stimulate local economic development that will benefit tribal citizens and their communities, as well as neighboring Mainers and their communities. According to the recent Harvard Report, self-government for the tribes would likely mean an additional \$330 million a year in Maine's Gross Domestic Product, more than 2,700 jobs, and \$39 million a year in state and local tax revenue.

We urge the committee to pass LD 2007, and start the process of correcting this injustice, by ensuring Wabanaki children, youth, and their families have all the rights and opportunities to achieve prosperity that should be afforded to them as tribal citizens in Maine.

Thank you for your consideration.