



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

To: Sen. Carney, Rep. Moonen, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary

From: Ben Conniff, Co-Founder & Chief Innovation Officer, Luke's Lobster

84 Industrial Park Rd. Saco, ME 04072

Dear Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Ben Conniff and I live in Portland. I am testifying on behalf of Luke's Lobster, the vertically-integrated lobster and seafood company I co-founded and where I currently act as the Chief Innovation Officer. I am writing to testify in support of LD 2007.

Luke's Lobster buys roughly 5 million pounds of Maine lobster per year, processes it in our own facility in Saco, Maine, and brings it to the nation through our restaurant group, our branded grocery products, and our online seafood market. We pride ourselves on being a Maine brand, and make our pride in our state a focal point of all our marketing.

As such, we have been proud of the many great strides the state has made to become more socially and environmentally responsible in the recent past. Leading the way on both environmental stewardship and inclusivity helps us market Maine products to consumers around the country.

The one glaring exception is our state's refusal to grant sovereignty to the Indigenous people from whom these lands were stolen. Around the country, 570 other tribes are benefiting from federal self-determination policies that are creating thousands of jobs and spurring economic revival. This boom is not just helping the tribal members who directly benefit from the programs, but all people in their regions; when tribes are allowed to access opportunities for economic growth, they create economic activity that bolsters all the businesses around them and grow their states' GDP.

It is frankly embarrassing to be representing the one state that has denied even the slightest benefit to be returned to the people who stewarded the land we now call Maine for thousands of years before the violent arrival of Europeans. To cling to a 1980 agreement signed under great duress as a reason to deny federal benefits to these people denies logic and fairness.

Knowing that giving the Wabanaki access to these benefits would only help our entire state economically, it's hard to imagine any reason for clinging to the status quo other than entrenched white supremacy. When your state becomes known for that, it makes selling the Maine brand very difficult.

I ask that you pass LD 2007 and see it through to becoming law. Thank you for your time.





Sincerely,

Benjamin Conniff

Co-Founder & Chief Innovation Officer

Luke's Lobster