

Anna Brown
Freeport Maine/ Aequita Consulting LLC
LD 2007

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

From: Anna Brown, Founding Principal, Aequita Consulting LLC, 22 Main St. South Freeport, ME

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

Dear Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Anna Brown and I live in Freeport. I am a small business owner with nearly two decades of professional experience working on environmental, social equity, and climate change. Beyond my career, I have been active in environmental work since elementary school. I also was born and raised in Maine. I am providing testimony on behalf of myself and my company, Aequita Consulting LLC. I strongly support LD 2007.

I support LD 2007 for both moral and practical reasons. This bill is about fairness and equity for the Wabanaki, the first people who were here long before my white ancestors lay foot in these woods and waters. It is high time for the State to take steps to honor and recognize the Wabanaki right to self-determination. In 2020, a bipartisan task force reached consensus on 22 recommendations and this bill would finally enable implementation of many of these. Passing LD 2007 is unquestionably the right thing to do.

In addition to the moral and human rights grounds that alone should warrant passage of LD2007, there are so many other practical reasons as well. The evidence is clear that healthy and thriving ecosystems align with healthy and thriving human communities. Maine's wild and scenic beauty didn't happen by accident. One recent paper in *Current Biology* (2022) states, "Intact, high-integrity forests are important for conservation and planetary functioning, with forest integrity indicated as a key measure of ecosystem health in the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework." The study used a forest landscape integrity index and Anthrome datasets, which capture the global ecological patterns shaped by direct human interactions with ecosystems, and found that, "high-integrity forests tend to be located within the overlap of protected areas and Indigenous lands (protected-Indigenous areas)." The Wabanaki peoples have cared for and stewarded the lands and waters for millennia. They have fished, hunted, and conserved in a way that considers the needs today while also protecting those of future generations. Each year, the evidence is clearer that we are in a moment of a rapid climate change, which runs in parallel to other forms of environmental degradation and biodiversity loss. There is an urgent need to turn to the wisdom, knowledge, and practices of the peoples who lived in harmony with the land before the settlers arrived. Passing LD 2007 will help secure the tribes' future, restoring their right to sustain traditional cultural values and practices and also establishing their own form of government. This restoration strengthens the conditions for environmental protection while also disrupting some of the drivers of climate change— the disconnection to the land and extractive relationship that has globally given rise to the climate crisis. Passage of LD 2007 will make Maine a healthier, more resilient, and vibrant place for all.

This bill would also help address the alarming reality that tribes in Maine are falling behind economically when compared to 570 other tribes across the country who have been experiencing an economic boom. By easing the Settlement Act's restriction, the Wabanaki would be able to take full advantage of the federal self-determination policies. An important Harvard Study (2021) found that the average income growth since 1989 has been 61 percent for tribal citizens not located in Maine, but only 9 percent for Wabanaki citizens in Maine. During this same time frame, Maine's overall

income growth for the same period was 25 percent. These figures are shocking, but not surprising given the history of systemic exclusion the Wabanaki have faced. LD 2007 will be a step toward correcting these wrongs and starting a process to enable the Wabanaki to improve health, educational, and economic outcomes. It's also critical to acknowledge that the economic restrictions have hit children the hardest. By passing LD 2007 would also have critical benefits to Wabanaki communities as a whole, especially children.

I am among thousands of Mainers and among hundreds of business owners who stand for Wabanaki self-determination. I know that when the Wabanaki thrive, rural Maine thrives. Conversely, when the self-determination of the Wabanaki goes unrecognized by the state, the consequences are dire not only for these first peoples, but for all Maine communities and for the lands and waters and habitats that are critical for our collective health, well-being, and happiness.

Thank you very much and I hope that I can count on your support for LD 2007.

Sincerely,
Anna Brown