



February 26, 2024

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee,

I join you today on behalf of the Maine Women's Lobby. For over forty years, the Maine Women's Lobby has worked to build gender justice in Maine through legislative advocacy and systems change.

We are here today in support of LD 2007, An Act to Advance Self-determination for Wabanaki Nations, and thank Speaker Talbot Ross for sponsoring this important bill. We also offer our thanks to the Wabanaki people of this region - the people of the Aroostook Band of Micmacs, the Houlton Band of Maliseets, the Passamaquoddy Tribes at Motahkokmikuk and Sipayuk, and the Penobscot Nation. We thank them for their care and commitment, and for organizing the voices and experiences before the committee today.

Our work at the Women's Lobby is rooted in the idea that public policy can be used as a tool to hold and consolidate power and resources, or as a tool of justice, building equity across gender, race, class, and more. **For too long, Maine's public policy has held on to old notions of policy and power when it comes to the relationship with the Wabanaki tribes.** Indeed, when the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 was passed at the national level, Maine was one of the last states to enact the Act in the late 1930s¹. Now, Maine is one of the only states which persists in maintaining a relationship with the Tribes which denies them access to their right to self-determination.

At every turn policy has been used to keep resources and power in the hands of the few, at great cost to the region's people, land, water, and all living things. **We see the effects of this harm in myriad ways – especially on the lives of Native women and girls, who are dramatically more likely to experience sexual violence, domestic violence, stalking, and other forms of interpersonal trauma that are a result of colonization²**, and legal structures that have disempowered the Tribes from meaningful response³.

¹ Library of Congress. (n.d.). Voting Rights for Native Americans. Retrieved from

<https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/elections/right-to-vote/voting-rights-for-native-americans/>

²National Institute of Justice. (2016). Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women: a Report. Retrieved from <https://www.bia.gov/service/mmu/missing-and-murdered-indigenous-people-crisis>

³ Cifillilo. (2021). Legal Barriers to Tribal Jurisdiction over Violence Against Women in Maine: Developments and Paths Forward in Maine: Developments and Paths Forward; Maine Law Review. Retrieved from <https://www.bia.gov/service/mmu/missing-and-murdered-indigenous-people-crisis>

It doesn't have to be this way. Nearly every other state has chosen a different path – one that aligns with the federal standards, and one which is more respectful of the inherent right of the Tribes to self-govern. It's time for Maine to make a different choice.

At the heart of our work for gender equity and feminist public policy advocacy is the notion of self-determination and the dignity of bodily autonomy as a human right. We could not continue to work for these principles without supporting the same rights and recognition for the original stewards of these lands. We stand with the Wabanaki people in this work. Please vote 'ought to pass' on LD 2007.

Sincerely,

Destie Hohman Sprague
Maine Women's Lobby