



Maine State Legislature
Judiciary Committee

February 26, 2024

Testimony of Conservation Law Foundation in Support of LD 2007, *An Act to Advance Self-determination for Wabanaki Nations*

Chair Carney, Chair Moonen, and members of the Judiciary Committee, I am Sean Mahoney, Vice President and Senior Counsel of the Conservation Law Foundation. CLF submits this testimony in support of LD 2007, An Act to Advance Self-determination for Wabanaki Nations.

CLF, founded in 1966, is a public-interest advocacy group that works to solve the environmental challenges that threaten the people, natural resources and communities in Maine and across New England. In Maine for almost four decades, CLF is a member-supported organization that has worked to ensure that laws and policies are developed, implemented and enforced that protect and restore our natural resources, are good for Maine's economy and environment and address the climate crisis in a manner that recognizes the fierce urgency of the crisis, and the need to do so in a just and inclusive way.

For hundreds of years, the Wabanaki Nations for whom this land was home long before Europeans first set foot here have experienced the horrific effects of colonization, dispossession and cultural genocide. The State of Maine's treatment of natural resources during our relatively short period of statehood has been equally shameful, especially in comparison to the stewardship of the Wabanaki Nations for centuries beforehand. As an organization focused on protecting the environment for all people, CLF believes that it is essential that communities that have been disempowered, taken advantage of, marginalized, discriminated against and/or environmentally overburdened and underserved be empowered to chart their own future in a manner that redresses those injustices. That is particularly the case with respect to the Wabanaki Nations who have endured such treatment since Europeans arrived in what is now called Maine at least four centuries ago.

It has become clear that the relationship between the State of Maine and the Wabanaki Nations will never fully be what it rightfully should and must be without changes to its structure, in particular restoring the sovereignty and rights to self-determination of the Wabanaki Nations. LD 2007 is another critical step in achieving that end and we support it. We recognize and support the sovereignty and rights to self-determination of the Wabanaki Nations and believe that righting the wrong that today is the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act is long overdue. LD 2007 marks a turning point in the path toward reconciliation of non-Indigenous and Indigenous Peoples in Maine. There is much work to be done, and it will take many years, but we cannot miss this opportunity to take this meaningful—and fundamental—step toward reconciliation.

We urge this Committee to vote ought to pass on LD 2007.