



**Maine Education Association**  
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**Testimony in support of  
LD 2007 "An Act to Advance Self-determination for Wabanaki Nations"  
Grace Leavitt, President, Maine Education Association  
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary  
February 26, 2024**

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary,

My name is Grace Leavitt. I am a Spanish teacher, on leave, serving as President of the Maine Education Association. The MEA represents nearly 24,000 educators in our Maine system of public education, in pre-K-12 schools as well as in our institutions of higher education, and both retired and aspiring educators.

In 2022, MEA provided this Committee with testimony in support of LD 1626, "An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act". That testimony included the following:

"Each year, thousands of delegates elected by the state associations come together to the NEA Representative Assembly to conduct the work of the NEA, including the adoption of New Business Items—actions that the representatives of our nearly three million members direct the NEA to take. At the 2019 NEA RA, the delegates adopted New Business Item 64, which directed the NEA to "consider acknowledging the native people of whom this land originated.

"Since the passage of NBI 64, at all meetings and convenings of the NEA, the practice has been that the participants begin with a Land Acknowledgement. This practice has since been adopted in our meetings here in Maine as well."

While we have continued the practice of beginning our meetings and conferences with a Land Acknowledgement, we have since learned so much and have come to understand the importance of doing more than merely "acknowledging."

Self-determination continues to be a question of fairness and equity. For over forty years, the Wabanaki Nations have been denied full access to federal policies that the other 570 federal tribes have had. Of the greatest concern to MEA members as educators is the impact that the restrictions have had on economic growth and thus ultimately on children. The Wabanaki child poverty rate is significantly higher—four times higher—in comparison with the rest of our state.<sup>1</sup>

MEA urges the Committee to vote 'ought to pass' on LD 2007 to address the inequities that the Wabanaki tribes have faced for so long. It is time to do more than 'acknowledge.'

<sup>1</sup><https://www.mecep.org/blog/tribal-sovereignty-explainer/>