

February 26, 2024

RE: Support for LD 2007, An Act to Advance Self-determination for Wabanaki Nations

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

My name is Robert Lewis-Nash and I live in South Portland. I submit this testimony in support of LD 2007, An Act to Advance Self-determination for Wabanaki Nations.

My family has deep roots in Maine. My ancestors became wealthy from their flourishing business when they helped to dredge Portland Harbor, and shipped ice and coal to and from Maine's largest port. While many factors contributed to their prosperity, the ability to make their own choices and pursue their ideas were foundational to their success. The same principle applies to any entrepreneur, and more broadly, it applies to the success and well-being of any community or society.

While my family's roots here may seem deep to some, they are small compared to the thousands of years that the Wabanaki people have lived here. But unlike my ancestors and my community today, Maine does not recognize the Wabanaki Nations' inherent right to make their own choices for their people and realize the prosperity that right can bring.

If we look beyond Maine's borders to all other states in the U.S., we can see what is possible when tribal sovereignty is recognized. The past 50 years comprise a historic period called the Self-Determination Era, in reference to the shift in federal policy to actively support tribal sovereignty after centuries of intentionally undermining it. The result has been a widespread and massive growth in tribes' economies and overall well-being – income, housing availability, job opportunities, and access to healthcare have all risen, often dramatically so. What is more, tribes' neighboring communities often experience these same benefits as a result, which can be particularly impactful in rural and under-resourced areas like many parts of Maine.^{1,2}

There are so many reasons to support tribal sovereignty. For me, today, the most glaring is that 50 years of experience in this country clearly shows that **everyone, Wabankai and all Mainers, stand to benefit from supporting the Tribes' right to self-determination.** Why would we ever leave a promising possibility for collective prosperity on the table?

Thank you to all members of the Judiciary Committee for considering my testimony,

Robert Lewis-Nash
42 Heather Road, South Portland

¹ Kunesh, P.H. (2022). The power of self-determination in building sustainable economies in Indian Country. *Economic Policy Institute*.

² Kalt, J.P. (2022). American Indian Self-Determination Through Self-Governance: The Only Policy That Has Ever Worked. *The Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development*.