



To: Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary

From: Elise Hartill, Co-Director, Maine Youth for Climate Justice

Date: February 26, 2024

Re: Testimony in favor of LD 2007

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Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and the honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Elise Hartill and I am writing as a representative of Maine Youth for Climate Justice (MYCJ), a coalition of over 400 youth from across the state who are fighting for bold climate action and a just transition to a livable future in Maine. I am writing in favor of LD 2007, *An Act to Advance Self-determination for Wabanaki Nations*.

As a climate justice coalition, MYCJ stands in solidarity with the Wabanaki tribes. MYCJ recognizes that there is no climate or environmental justice without tribal sovereignty. The tribes have a history of stewardship of natural resources and the land, and should have the right to manage tribal lands, waters, and resources. A just transition off of fossil fuels, attempts to mitigate climate change, and effective adaptation strategies to the climate crisis will not occur in Maine without tribal sovereignty and the state listening to Wabanaki leadership and communities.

The Wabanaki tribes should also have the right to address and respond to environmental injustices that occur in their communities, as marginalized communities disproportionately bear the brunt of pollution and the effects of climate change. The Wabanaki tribes should be able to determine for themselves what happens on their native land without the state interfering.

LD 1626 is also an issue of fairness. As many others have stated today, the tribes in

Maine have not benefited from more than 150 federal laws passed since 1980 that have helped 570 other federally recognized tribes. These were opportunities for economic development, increased health care access, natural disaster responses, and expanded environmental protections. Other federally recognized tribes have also had access to opportunities that have supported job creation, protected drinking water, and allowed for action under the Violence Against Women Act, which the Wabanaki tribes have not been able to pursue. The Wabanaki tribes are not asking for special rights, but for equity and to be treated like all other federally recognized tribes.

The state of Maine has repeatedly fought the tribes in court and obstructed tribal self-governance. Now, the state has a chance to instead begin addressing the harm it has caused to the Wabanaki tribes by respecting and restoring tribal sovereignty. For the above reasons, our coalition urges you to vote ought-to-pass on LD 1626. Thank you for your time.