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Maine Philanthropy Center
LD 2007

Maine Philanthropy Center (MPC), a statewide organization committed to advancing the effectiveness of philanthropy in Maine and its ability to make a meaningful difference, stands with the tribal nations in Maine and expresses our unwavering support for both recognizing the inherent sovereignty of the Wabanaki nations and restoring the same rights, privileges, and immunities as all other 570 federally-recognized tribes across the country.

MPC recognizes that our sector has a role in speaking out and righting this local, longstanding injustice to be authentically committed to equity, and we are speaking out now as the state considers LD 2007, An Act to Advance Self-Determination for Wabanaki Nations. We want to make it clear that we support this legislation and encourage the legislature to pass and the governor to sign this into law because:

We believe in restoring self-determination for all communities. Tribal sovereignty is the ultimate expression of self-determination. In philanthropy, we strive to build a world where people have self-determination over their lives and futures. We believe that those most impacted are the best positioned to find solutions and drive change within their communities. Without sovereignty, tribes must rely on complicated agreements that disenfranchise and disempower them. Self-determination puts the power of solutions into the hands of those that know best--the original inhabitants of this land, the Wabanaki.

We believe in the importance of preserving culture, history, and the environment. Tribal sovereignty will ensure the cultural identity of Maine Tribes is protected, preserved, and can thrive. Native culture, identity, and health are deeply connected to a reciprocal relationship with the earth and the natural environment. If the State of Maine does not restore the full ability of the Maine tribes to cultivate and manage their environment in a way that is culturally appropriate, that inaction will make certain the loss of deep cultural knowledge and practices--threatening the Tribes' short- and long-term viability.

We believe in equity as a value and in action. Tribal sovereignty will create equal opportunity for Maine Tribes. The current agreement restricts Tribes' access to rightful resources and supports from existing federal government programs -- forcing scarcity where there should be abundance and reliance on the generosity of donors and philanthropy when this change would promote access to resources that already exist that should fill these gaps. Restoration of sovereignty would mean more critical resources are directed into our state.

We believe Maine should be a welcoming place for all. Restoring Tribal sovereignty demonstrates that all have a place here. Maine benefits from positive in-migration, in part, because we are seen as a welcoming and attractive home. Restoring sovereignty is a true demonstration of upholding the value of equity and sends a clear message that Maine is a welcoming place for others to come, to visit, to invest, and to live.

We believe in a vibrant place for all. Tribal Sovereignty benefits all Maine people. There is now extensive research that shows that when Tribes gain sovereignty, both tribal and non-tribal members benefit. According to research, the exercise of tribal sovereignty in the past 30 years in other parts of the US has resulted in "more economic growth and improved well-being for American Indians than during any other point in the more than 500-year history post-contact with European colonists and settlers. Increased self-governance over tribal lands and resources created new economic and employment opportunities for" Tribal and non-Tribal members on or residing near tribal lands.

Within our own sector, we have much to do to be "in right relationship" with the earth - where we are in a sustainable and loving relationship with all living beings. Philanthropy has much work to do, and MPC will continue to push our sector toward a more just relationship with Maine Tribes.

As we encourage philanthropy, so now do we call on all in Maine to begin to set tribal-state relations right; it is the right thing to do. Specifically, we call on the state to modernize Maine's relationship to the Wabanaki nations and restore the sovereign rights of the Wabanaki nations over their lands.