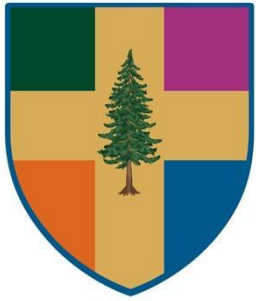


February 22, 2024



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TESTIMONY of the RT. REV. THOMAS J. BROWN
BISHOP of the EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF MAINE

In SUPPORT

L.D. 2007, *An Act to Advance Self-determination for Wabanaki Nations*

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary; my name is Thomas Brown, and I have the distinct honor and blessing to present this testimony to you as the Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Maine in support of the principles that are proposed in this legislation.

First and foremost, I want to thank you for your service. It demonstrates incredible courage for any person to step forward and offer their talents to serve their neighbors, and as legislators, you are faced with enormous challenges that defy simple, monochromatic solutions. This legislation is certainly representative of such a landscape.

You don't need me to convey to you the incredibly fraught history of the relationship between the Wabanaki—the People of the Dawn—and those who settled here first as colonists, and over several hundred years, established a cultural dominance that has, at many points, caused great harm.

In the Episcopal Diocese of Maine, our interest in these policy matters is a reflection of our commitment to social justice and an unending quest for peace among all of God's children. We are under no illusion that past wrongs can be erased or even fully corrected; but in the context of public policy, the bridges that our spiritual lives prepare us to build are statutory constructs that foster and promote justice, equality, and dignity in our communities.

There are many proposals you will be contemplating for inclusion in L.D. 2007; most of those have been discussed before at great length, and over time we have observed that finding agreement on moving many of these proposed policy amendments forward has proven elusive. And yet the work continues, and we are buoyed with hope that progress will be made to allow the sovereign communities of the Wabanaki to embrace a hopeful future, to bring the post-colonial settler communities and the indigenous tribes closer together as neighbors, and to bless each other with a cooperative spirit and dignity that can only grow and thrive when we build trust and work together.

It is for these ends we endeavor in our work, and with grateful hearts we turn to you for your best work in crafting the final product that this important legislation promises.

I regret that I cannot be with you in person today; but should you have questions of me or others in the Diocese, we will happily make ourselves available for further conversations.

Thank you for your attention, and may you walk in God's peace.

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