

Testimony in support of LD 1626

February 14, 2022

Honorable chairs of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Ben Chin, and I am a resident of Lewiston, and father of two children entering the public schools.

Until recently, I took for granted that my children could go to school and drink the water from the faucet; that the criminal justice system will provide them recourse if they grow up and suffer domestic violence; that the economic development programs designed to benefit everyone will be able to help the community in which we live become more prosperous.

Unfortunately, I no longer take these basic facts for granted. Two things have come to light that have shifted our family's thinking. First, we have become more and more aware about how Wabanaki tribes in Maine are routinely denied these basic rights. Because Maine's laws do not recognize their sovereignty, Wabanaki people too often cannot drink their water, protect their bodies from violence, and develop their economic potential.

But our thinking has shifted for a second reason as well. In Lewiston, much like the rest of Maine, these necessities cannot be taken for granted either. Last week, our superintendent informed us of dangerously high levels of lead in the drinking water of my children's schools. Our broken criminal justice system can do little to prevent the root causes of domestic violence, particularly the cycles of trauma, exacerbated by economic insecurity, that trigger violence. Finally, even as our economy grows rapidly, far too many of us are left behind.

For these reasons, I support LD 1626.

Yes, current law is morally reprehensible. People who survive genocide deserve self-determination. Tribal sovereignty is just ethical common sense.

And it has also become clear that all of us have a stake in righting this wrong. The Wabanaki have a far better track record of "environmental protection" than our state and federal governments. Their traditional means of resolving injuries to community members works better than the American criminal justice system. We all can learn from tribal models of equitable economic development. If we want the best, most creative ideas to solve our toughest problems, it's time for the state to get out of the way; the Wabanaki people have a right to chart their own course; it's in our best interest to learn what they have to teach us.

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