

Good Morning Senator Carney, Representative Harnett, and members of the Judiciary Committee. We are UMS professors, researchers, graduate and undergraduate students affiliated with the Downeast Rural Health Collaborative, an interdisciplinary, interinstitutional team dedicated to addressing health inequity in Maine. We submit this testimony in enthusiastic support of LD 1626.

In accordance with Policy 214, our views do not reflect the position of our employer.

*“The University of Maine [at Orono and Augusta] recognize that [they] are located on Marsh Island and in the homeland of Penobscot people, where issues of water and territorial rights, and encroachment upon sacred sites, are ongoing. Penobscot homeland is connected to other Wabanaki Tribal Nations- the Passamaquoddy, Maliseet, and Micmac– through kinship, alliances, and diplomacy. The University also recognizes that the Penobscot Nation and other Wabanaki Tribal Nations are ‘distinct sovereign, legal and political entities with their own powers of self governance and self *determination.’”(Ranco, 2018)*

For the last several years, the University of Maine has adopted the First Nations practice of honoring ancestral land wherever we go, as we have done here today. Crafted in partnership with members of the Wabanaki alliance, we have taken a step toward building an equitable relationship (Girouard, 2020)(Francis, K. & Hunter, S., 2018).

“The University of Maine at Machias recognizes that it is located in the homeland of the Passamaquoddy Tribe, where issues of water and territorial rights, and encroachment upon sacred sites, are ongoing. Passamaquoddy homeland is connected to the other Wabanaki Tribal Nation — the Penobscot, Maliseet, and Micmac — through kinship, alliances, and diplomacy. The University also recognizes that the Passamaquoddy Tribe and the other Wabanaki Tribal Nations are distinct, sovereign, legal and political entities with their own powers of self-governance and self-determination.” (University of Maine at Machias, 2018)

But a step is not enough by itself, and a promise is empty without action to back it up (The Bertha Crosley Ball Center for Compassion, 2018). This acknowledgment is not meant to be the way the University grants itself permission to remain inactive in the face of injustice. We acknowledge the Wabanaki Alliance as a sovereign nation, but until they are granted their rights to self-govern, we are forced to engage with them as a special interest group instead of as an equal, fully recognized government that is separate from our own.

“We would like to begin by recognizing that the University of Maine at Farmington occupies the traditional homelands of the Abenaki people of Anmessokkanti, whose communities lived and sustained themselves along what we call the “Sandy River” for millennia until very recent times... We acknowledge that UMF inherited its campus at the expense of the Abenaki community, after centuries of war, scalp bounty policies, and other tactics designed to extinguish the Abenaki from their own land. These events forced most Anmessokkanti to relocate to two Abenaki reservations in Quebec in 1704, called Wôlinak and Odanak. Many families descending from the Farmington area remain there today. We recognize that the dispossession and expulsion of the Abenaki from their homeland is an ongoing injustice upheld by settler colonialism. We pledge to bravely confront this painful reality.

“We acknowledge that the Abenaki people of Odanak and Wôlinak descend from the original care-takers of this area, and maintain a sacred connection with it. We pledge to honor them by educating ourselves about their history and current struggles, and accepting our responsibility to correct ongoing injustice.

We wish to also extend this acknowledgement to the Maliseet, Mi'kmaq, Penobscot and Passamaquoddy nations who, with the Abenaki, make up the Wabanaki people.

We recognize and affirm the sovereignty of the Native nations in this territory and beyond. We recognize that sovereignty means the ability to self-govern, and to govern over one's homelands. We understand that this statement has real implications, and that decolonization is not a metaphor.

We pledge to continue our collaboration with Wabanaki people to further decolonize spaces and to transform UMF into a place that honors Wabanaki and other Indigenous peoples. We acknowledge that this is an ongoing process in which the University of Maine at Farmington promises to partake, in partnership the many Indigenous individuals who have contributed to this important cause.”(Obomsawin & Ranco, 2021)

The messy entanglement of the two governments deeply concerns us. As researchers, we are unable to fully partner with the Wabanaki as our land acknowledgment promises. We have a responsibility to adequately support our First Nation students, and we can not serve those needs until we can collaborate with their sovereign government (Tomer, 2021). Instead, the University is exalted as exceedingly generous while First Nation students are perceived as a charity (Tomer, 2021). Until legislation takes action, the tribes are not able to negotiate with any of our institutions as equals, and equitable partnerships will remain unattainable.

*“[The University of Southern Maine] is located in Portland, Maine, which was settled on the traditional territory of the Wabanaki Confederacy. We recognize and honor the current Tribes who comprise the Wabanaki Confederacy—the Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, Maliseet, and Micmac peoples—who have stewarded this land throughout the generations. We respect the traditional values of these Tribes and affirm their inherent sovereignty in this territory. We support their efforts for land and water protection and restoration, and for cultural healing and recovery. **We pause in remembrance of the Tribes of the Wabanaki Confederacy whose lives and land were taken through genocidal strategies of colonial settlement of this land.***

We pay respect to elders both past and present, and we commit to the ongoing work of decolonization in Maine and beyond.” (The Bertha Crosley Ball Center for Compassion, 2018)
We call upon our legislators to acknowledge the land and honor those who have lived where we stand. We call upon Maine to respect federal law, and undo the restrictive policies that deny the Wabanaki Alliance their rights. We ask that you pass LD 1626, and allow us to build the equitable partnerships we promised to build.

Downeast Health Research Collaborative Signatories:

Katherine Darling
Lois Ann-Kuntz
Lauren Sachs
Gray Jones
Timothy Whiton
Tora Johnson
Jennifer Crittenden
Erika Ziller
Linda Silka

Valerie Rubinsky
Amy Dowley
Joseph Spiller
Emma Williams
Tyler DuBois
Debra Kantor
Matraca Bellegarde
Bridie McGreavy
Tara Casimir

References

- The Bertha Crosley Ball Center for Compassion. (2018). *Land Acknowledgement University of Southern Maine*. The Bertha Crosley Ball Center for Compassion University of Southern Maine. Retrieved February 14, 2022, from <https://usm.maine.edu/bertha-crosley-ball-center-compassion/land-acknowledgement>
- Francis, K.; Hunter, S. (2018, May 10). *Memorandum of understanding between the Penobscot Nation and the University of Maine System, University of Maine (Orono)*[Memorandum]. University of Maine. <https://umaine.edu/nativeamericanprograms/wp-content/uploads/sites/320/2018/05/Penobscot-Nation-UMaine-MOU.pdf>
- Girouard, M. (2020, December 3). *Acknowledging the land*. Wabanaki REACH. Retrieved February 14, 2022, from https://www.mainewabanakireach.org/acknowledging_the_land?fbclid=IwAR2Vu59aJ_-GNePmgr2mtdK_NrzM4DqAunvV-t7LCRrc-HGWtRYk6OMznLo
- Obomsawin, M., & Ranco, D. (2021, November 19). *Indigenous land and water acknowledgement. The Indigenous Land and Water Acknowledgement statement was authored by Mali Obomsawin (Odanak Abenaki First Nation, Bomazeen Land Trust) with input from Darren Ranco (Penobscot Nation, University of Maine)*. University of Maine at Farmington. Retrieved February 15, 2022, from <https://www.umf.maine.edu/about/indigenous/>
- Ranco, D. J. (2018). *University of Maine cooperative extension land acknowledgment**. University of Maine Cooperative Extension. Retrieved February 15, 2022, from <https://extension.umaine.edu/about/university-of-maine-cooperative-extension-land-acknowledgment/>
- Tomer, Katie. "The Importance of Education and Trust Building for Wabanaki Self-Governance." *Maine Policy Review* 30.1 (2021) : 54 -59, <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mpr/vol30/iss1/5>.
- University of Maine at Machias. (2018). *Land acknowledgement*. University of Maine at Machias. Retrieved February 14, 2022, from <https://machias.edu/about-umm/umm-land-acknowledgement/>