

Rep. Rachel Talbot Ross
Co-Chair

Amb. Maulian Dana,
Penobscot Nation
Co-Chair



**Permanent
Commission**
**RACIAL, INDIGENOUS
& TRIBAL POPULATIONS**

April 14, 2022

House Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee For Indigenous Peoples Of The United States
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

To the Subcommittee For Indigenous Peoples Of The United States:

People in Maine know that our communities thrive when we have the ability to choose our own paths. The Wabanaki, the first people to call this land home, know this, too. As Co-Chairs of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous and Tribal Populations, and in our roles as Tribal Ambassador for the Penobscot Nation and State Representative, we are writing in support of H.R. 6707. We believe this legislation represents a small, but critical step toward recognizing the inherent rights of Wabanaki tribal nations –to begin to heal old wounds so that all of us can grow and thrive together. We thank Rep. Golden for introducing this legislation.

H.R. 6707 would amend a deal that hasn't worked for anyone. The Land Claims Settlement Act of 1980 was supposed to focus on resolving the valid land claims of the tribes, but instead, turned into an effort by the state to severely restrict the inherent sovereign rights of the Wabanaki Nations in order to prevent a "nation within a nation." State leaders at the time thought that recognizing the full political existence of our tribal nations would somehow diminish us as a state. Whatever the cause for those feelings in 1980, they simply have not turned out to be true here in Maine or in other states. Instead, state governments that have embraced their tribal nations and developed productive and meaningful political relationships with them have seen those relationships bring progress to the entire state.

Deals often don't work out the way they were intended and it is never too late to set things right. There are no other tribal nations in the country that experience this type of limit on sovereignty. Wabanaki people are not wards of the state, but members of sovereign tribal nations. Wabanaki reservations are not municipalities, but communities of people who have been living in these homelands for thousands of years before Maine existed. It is time for federal Indian Law to apply to Maine tribes, just as it does for all other federally recognized tribes in this nation.

We thank you for your consideration of this letter and ask you to recommend passage of H.R. 6707.

In Solidarity,

Ambassador Maulian Dana
Co-Chair

Representative Rachel Talbot Ross
Co-Chair