

The Honorable Raul Grijalva
Chairman
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515
naomi.miguel@mail.house.gov

The Honorable Bruce Westerman
Ranking Member
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515
ken.degenfelder@mail.house.gov

RE: Support for H.R. 6707, *Advancing Equality for Wabanaki Nations Act*

April 13, 2022

Dear Chairman Grijalva and Ranking Member Westerman,

You will be seeing a substantial overview of the issues being addressed by H.R. 6707, in the process of this hearing. I am not a legal expert, and will not be going over those points in detail. Rather, I would like to speak to the issues related to this legislation that feel most pressing to me, as a non-native resident of Maine.

The 1980 Settlement Act attempted to address tribal issues in a new and different way, perhaps with the best of intentions. The intervening 41 years have demonstrated the ways in which the federal Act and its companion in Maine law have had consequences that do not serve the four federally recognized tribes in Maine in a way that is fair and honoring their status as sovereign nations.

Most importantly, the federally recognized tribes in Maine have been singled out for treatment that has been to their detriment by both the United States government, and the government of Maine, by being treated differently than the other 570 federally recognized tribes in the United States. H.R. 6707 would help to repair this situation, with carefully considered adjustments to the federal legislation to make it more equitable.

I am particularly distressed at the ways that the current situation has blocked everything from healthcare to disaster and emergency relief, and has contributed to years and years of inadequate and ineffective response to the horrific rates of violence against native women and girls on tribal lands, mostly perpetrated by non-native assailants.

Although the Violence Against Women Act has finally been addressed in Maine, it should not have taken so long, and at what cost to the lives lost while the process dragged on. Without amendment to the 1980 Settlement Act, it's a setup for an endless stream of harms such as these, as each new situation presents itself, with an inadequate structure for the people of the Wabanaki Nations in Maine to address these issues themselves.

Furthermore, it's completely unfair that the four federally recognized tribes in Maine are singled out for this treatment, different from the 570 other federally recognized tribes across the United States. This needs to be fixed. Please pass H.R. 6707, which will address these issues.

Respectfully,
Shemaya Laurel
Gouldsboro, Maine

cc: Representative Jared Golden, aaron.sege@mail.house.gov
Representative Chellie Pingree, evan.johnston@mail.house.gov