



NICWA

National Indian Child Welfare Association
Protecting Our Children • Preserving Our Culture

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March 29, 2022

The Honorable Raúl M. Grijalva
Chair
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Teresa Leger Fernandez
Chair
Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples
of the U.S.
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Bruce Westerman
Ranking Member
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515


The Honorable Jay Obernolte
Vice Ranking Member
Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples
of the U.S.
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Support for the Passage of H.R. 6707, the Advancing Equality for Wabanaki Nations Act (AEWNA)

Dear Chair Grijalva, Ranking Member Westerman, Chair Leger Fernandez, and Vice Ranking Member Obernolte,

The National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA) offers its full support for the passage of H.R. 6707, the Advancing Equality for Wabanaki Nations Act (AEWNA), sponsored by Congressman Jared Golden (ME-02). NICWA is dedicated to ensuring that every Indian child has access to community-based, culturally appropriate services that help them grow up safe, healthy, and spiritually strong. We support tribal nations in building governmental capacity to support Indian children and families and supportive policy development to improve services to Indian children and families. NICWA believes that all tribal nations should have the opportunity to fully exercise their sovereignty to protect their tribal children and families, which includes exercising tribal jurisdiction in child welfare, operation of a tribal family court, and the provision of needed healing and supportive services to Indian families. When tribal nations are able to exercise their jurisdiction, they not only provide necessary services and supports to their tribal members, but they also increase their capacity to be strong partners with state governments that are working with Indian families living off tribal lands.

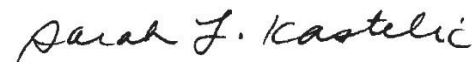
The Advancing Equality for Wabanaki Nations Act advances these policies in two important ways. It does so through amendments to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act of 1980, which limits the ability of the Wabanaki Nations (the four federally recognized tribes in the state of Maine) to enjoy the benefits of federal Indian self-determination laws that might affect state jurisdiction. First, AEWNA makes the Wabanaki Nations eligible to receive the same benefits and to exercise the same authorities as other federally recognized tribes under laws enacted by Congress in the future for the benefit of Indians. AEWNA does not change the application of existing federal Indian laws in Maine. Second, AEWNA makes all of the Wabanaki Nations equally eligible to assume jurisdiction over Indian child custody proceedings pursuant to the Indian Child Welfare Act, subject to approval by the Secretary of the Interior under section §1918 of



ICWA. Presently, the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act recognizes this eligibility for the Passamaquoddy Tribe and the Penobscot Nation, but not for the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians and the Mi'kmaq Nation.

NICWA is proud to support the child welfare provisions of AEWNA and respectfully urges its prompt passage by Congress.

Sincerely,



Sarah Kastelic
Executive Director

Congressman Jared Golden
Chief Clarissa Sabattis, Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians
Chief Edward Peter-Paul, Mi'kmaq Nation
Chief Kirk Francis, Penobscot Nation
Chief Maggie Dana, Passamaquoddy Tribe at Pleasant Point
Chief William Nicholas, Passamaquoddy Tribe at Indian Township