

January 9, 2024

To: Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs  
From: Shirley Hager, 129 Chesterville Hill Road, Chesterville, Maine 04938  
Re: Support for LD 1642, An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools, as amended

Good afternoon, Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Shirley Hager and I live in Chesterville, Maine. **I am here in strong support of LD 1642, An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools.**

For the past 40 years I have lived in Maine. During this time, I have served as an educator and then administrator with the University of Maine Cooperative Extension, where I delivered or oversaw educational programs throughout the state. Also, during this time, I have been lucky to be engaged in several efforts with Wabanaki individuals and organizations. Many times, I have heard Wabanaki, especially those who speak in classrooms or work with school groups, describe non-Native students being surprised to learn that they, the Wabanaki, still live here; or asking them if they still live in tipis, etc. I can tell you, as an adult educator, that grown-ups also lack basic knowledge of their Indigenous neighbors and harbor many misconceptions and misunderstandings as well.

The landmark 2001 Wabanaki Studies Law that mandated the teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine public schools was an excellent beginning to rectify this abysmal lack of knowledge about the people whose homeland this is, and has been, for millennia. Unfortunately, according to a 2022 study by the ACLU, MITSC, the Abbe Museum, and the Wabanaki Alliance, the law has not been meaningfully enforced in the state, school compliance is inconsistent and dependent upon the isolated initiative of a few school districts, and teachers have not been adequately prepared to teach the subject.

LD 1642 re-establishes the Wabanaki Studies Commission that was originally formed in 2001 and is essential to give the Department of Education, school administrators and teachers consistent and expert advice on teaching Wabanaki Studies in accordance with existing law. It will ensure that Wabanaki Studies is included in the review of content standards and performance indicators of Maine's learning results.

Indigenous and non-Indigenous students alike benefit from knowing and understanding the true and accurate history of the Indigenous peoples of this land, and of our shared history, and we have a responsibility to provide it. In this era when some states are choosing to omit or prohibit the teaching of any history that is uncomfortable, or challenges the status quo, even punishing those who choose to provide a more truthful education, it is more imperative than ever that Maine commit to giving our students the whole story.

I strongly urge you to unanimously vote "Ought to Pass" on LD 1642. Thank you.