



# SIERRA CLUB

## MAINE CHAPTER

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**To:** Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs  
**From:** Marianne Hill, Legislative Team Volunteer, Sierra Club Maine  
**Date:** January 10, 2024  
**Re:** Testimony in Support of to LD 2001: **An Act to Establish the African American Studies Advisory Council and Require Funding for African American Studies**

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Dear Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

We present these comments on behalf of Sierra Club Maine, representing over 22,000 supporters and members statewide. Founded in 1892, Sierra Club is one of our nation's oldest and largest environmental organizations. We work diligently to amplify the power of our 3.8 million supporters and members nation-wide as we strive towards combating climate change; conserving our land, air, and water; and promoting a just and sustainable economy. We are writing to urge you to vote "ought to pass" on LD 2001, **An Act to Establish the African American Studies Advisory Council and Require Funding for African American Studies**.

LD 2001 would enable educators to better prepare future generations of Mainers to work together harmoniously and so advance the well-being of both Maine and the country as a whole. The divisions that have torn apart our nation in the past are not only in the past; the construction of civil and productive communities rests on a deep understanding of one another and of the root causes of past divisions. This sentiment is central to the work of the Sierra Club, as we continue to understand the intersections between environmental justice and racial justice -- and work to combat both<sup>1</sup>.

The Department of Education has issued a statement in full support of the goals associated with inclusion of African American Studies in school curricula. However, teachers continue to ask for more resources and guidance. The support proposed in LD 2001 is both organizational and financial and would greatly enhance current efforts.

The establishment of the African American Studies Advisory Council and funding of African American Studies programs would fill the gap that now severely limits the ability of educators to effectively combat the misinformation and misunderstandings that enable racism and destructive divisions to continue. With this bill, resources will be made available

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/racial-justice-environmental-justice>

to school districts and teachers to support teaching that more adequately covers such topics as slavery and the New England economy and the history of civil rights in Maine. Providing more support to educators will enable our schools to offer a higher quality education that changes not only minds but hearts.

There is wonderful material available through the Maine Historical Society, the Portland Freedom Trail and through books such as *Maine's Visible Black History* by Price and Talbot that can change Mainers' understanding of themselves and their state in a way that strengthens our communities. The Department of Education has already begun compiling resources, structuring an approach and is well-positioned to further expand our students' understanding of the diverse world in which we live.

Please vote "ought to pass" on LD 2001.

Respectfully submitted

Marianne Hill  
Legislative Team Volunteer  
Sierra Club Maine Chapter