

To: Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
From: Laura Bither, 50 Marquis Rd, Freeport, 04032
Date: April 19, 2025

RE: Testimony in support of L.D. 1474, "An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools"

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is Laura Bither, I am a community organizer deeply embedded in Maine's climate movement, and a young person, and I live in Freeport.

I am testifying in support of L.D. 1474, "An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools," because I believe young people living in Maine should be able to learn about its history in school. I grew up in Freeport and am now living here in my late 20s. It was not until I came back to Maine after college that I was able to dive into independently studying the Wabanaki history that I was never taught in school. Maine is behind other states in Indigenous studies, and, if we want to cultivate a new generation of youth with a deep understanding of, and appreciation for, the places and communities where we live, who will return to Maine to build a more resilient future, we must prioritize teaching them the Wabanaki history that impacts us all.

Especially in the second-most rural state in the country, school district resources vary greatly. Including opportunities for school administrative units to apply for funding is critical to ensure that our less-resourced areas have the same access to this critically important education. And, no responsible work can be done without ensuring this work is accessible, and that we are paying Wabanaki advisors for their expertise and guidance in creating professional development microcourses. This bill includes so many crucial steps toward building a sustaining and strong Wabanaki Studies program toward a more equitable collective future of which I would be proud.

For these reasons, I respectfully encourage you to support L.D. 1474. Thank you for your time and consideration of my testimony.

Sincerely,

Laura Bither