

LD 1202

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

My name is Diane Oltarzewski and I am a registered voter residing in Belfast. I write to emphasize the importance of LD 1202 to the future of Maine's children, and I urge you to give it your full support. Specifically relating to Item #3 in the bill's summary, I believe it is essential to waste no time and **to *include a requirement for an African American studies course as a requirement for an educator credential in this state.***

We are facing a grave danger nationally as we witness the attempted whitewashing of our history and institutions by those in power, and their appalling rejection of diversity, equity and inclusion. This bill gives Maine the opportunity to challenge, to reject the lies that are being told.

We have to set the bar high so we can insure that students in Maine are provided with a comprehensive grasp of our national history. This can only happen with a *mandate* for adequate teacher preparation.

African American studies are American studies. In a recent guest column submitted to the Portland Press Herald, I wrote: "The truth of history lives inside us.... It will take time for direct experience to erode negative images we white people still harbor in our minds, however unconsciously. DEI is our bridge to a healthy mind, a healthy society. Diversity and inclusion expand our imagination, our ability to

communicate." A serious African American studies program will equip young Mainers, who often lack direct experience of a Black teacher, or Black fellow students, to understand our shared history and to recognize and appreciate the cultural gifts we receive from the African American community.

Please fully fund LD 1202 and be unanimous in recommending "ought to pass."

Thank you!