

Julia Wagner  
Biddeford  
LD 1474

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

My name is Julia, and I am a library specialist living in Biddeford, Maine. I am testifying in support of L.D. 1474, “An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools,” because I believe it is a vital and overdue step toward honoring the truth of our shared history and fulfilling promises already made. As an educator, I’ve seen firsthand how powerful it is when children are empowered to understand the history of the land they live on and preserve their native culture. I previously taught in Corsica, where I witnessed a community working hard to preserve and celebrate its culture in the face of long-standing French colonial pressures. Such efforts included promoting its language and heritage through songs and bilingual teaching in schools, celebrating traditional events, and protecting the integrity of the land. That experience left an impression on me as a story of ongoing success and shared pride for a community’s history. It’s part of why I feel so strongly that Wabanaki history, culture, and perspectives must be fully integrated into Maine’s schools—not just in name, but in practice. I originally come from Vermont, and I do not have a good understanding of the people who originally inhabited where I grew up because that was not prioritized in schools. I believe I am the worse for my ignorance in this area. To quote Dr. Maureen Smith, enrolled citizen of the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin and Director of Native American Studies at the University of Maine, Orono: “...how can any student be fully educated without an understanding of the original inhabitants of this land we now call home? How can a student have a complete education about the state without knowing the history and culture of the Wabanaki people?” As a new resident of Maine, I was excited to hear about the LD 291 law, passed in 2001, which made Wabanaki Studies a requirement, yet too many districts still fall short. LD 1474 will help change that by establishing a permanent Wabanaki Studies Specialist position in the Department of Education, ensuring that curriculum guidelines and graduation standards truly reflect this mandate. I would feel proud to be part of a state that values the telling of full histories.

This bill also prioritizes funding for Wabanaki-led professional development, curriculum creation, and teacher certification requirements—essential steps to meaningfully include Wabanaki voices in shaping how their histories are taught. Other states have already begun building robust Indigenous Studies departments. Maine has catching up to do, and this bill is a meaningful step forward. As someone passionate about teaching all of history—the good, the bad, and the ugly—I believe we cannot hope to build a just future if we do not confront and learn from the past. LD 1474 is not just a legal obligation; it is a moral one.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Julia Wagner