

THE FRIENDS COMMITTEE ON MAINE PUBLIC POLICY

April 22, 2025

To: Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

From: Shirley Hager, 129 Chesterville Hill Road, Chesterville, Maine 04938
On behalf of the **Friends (Quaker) Committee on Maine Public Policy, Committee on Tribal-State Relations**

Re: **Support for LD 1474, An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools**

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee: my name is Shirley Hager. In testifying in support of LD 1474, I speak on behalf of the **Committee on Tribal-State Relations of the Friends (Quaker) Committee on Maine Public Policy**. We are a statewide group that, for over thirty years, has advocated for a right and just relationship between the State of Maine and our Wabanaki neighbors. We align ourselves with the advancement of Wabanaki interests to the betterment, we believe, of all who live in Maine, and **we urge you to unanimously support LD 1474, An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools**.

I have lived in Maine for over 40 years. 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, the Maine Indian Tribal-State Commission (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.

The Friends Committee on Maine Public Policy is a statewide network of Quakers concerned with public policy and social justice issues. For over thirty years, one of our main priorities has been support of Wabanaki concerns and the improvement and strengthening of Tribal-state relations.

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LD 1474 requires ongoing funding for a Wabanaki Studies Specialist in the Department of Education, and for contracted Wabanaki advisors to advance the implementation of Wabanaki studies across the state. It provides funds that school districts can apply for to fund Wabanaki studies resources. LD 1474 also directs the state Board of Education to require completion of a Wabanaki studies component within teacher certification requirements. As well, it ensures funding is available to hire Wabanaki advisors and educators who would help the Wabanaki Studies Specialist create and implement short-term courses that would be available to all Maine teachers.

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 moment when the federal administration is restricting efforts to strengthen diversity, equity and inclusion in the lessons we teach, and in the stories we tell, even punishing those educators who seek to provide a more truthful education, it is more imperative than ever that Maine commit to giving our students the whole story. It is our moral duty.

The Friends Committee on Maine Public Policy strongly urges you to unanimously vote “Ought to Pass” on LD 1474.

Thank you.

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