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LD 1474

Although LD 291 has been a legal requirement since 2001, few Maine schools succeed in offering curriculum that meets the mark and teachers struggle to find resources and time to learn how and what they should be teaching in Wabanaki Studies. In my day-job as Executive Director of Friends of Katahdin Woods and Waters, I see our education team regularly connecting teachers to Wabanaki Studies resources and the refrain is: "We do not have enough information, We do not feel comfortable teaching this, Please help." We have regularly hired Barry Dana, Wabanaki REACH, and others to join our team to help teachers and students in this area, but there is an urgent need and demand for the State to do more to equip educators to tackle Wabanaki studies.

LD 1474 supports a permanent position at DOE to develop Wabanaki Studies curriculum and resources for all Maine schools. By permanently establishing the position of Wabanaki Studies Specialist in the Maine Department of Education, the bill ensures the inclusion of Wabanaki Studies in essential instruction and graduation requirements. Currently, a Wabanaki citizen holds this significant (though not yet permanent) position.

As parent of three children in the Bangor schools, I have witnessed first hand both the power of Wabanaki studies for my children as well as the struggles and missteps teachers have faced in engaging with this nuanced curriculum. This mirrors my professional experience as well.

Maine is behind the curve in teaching Indigenous studies, compared with other states. Montana, Oregon, and Minnesota, and many other states have funded teams of employees to support statewide instruction on Indigenous studies. A meaningful first step for Maine will be to create the permanent Wabanaki Studies Specialist position and to ensure proper compensation for Wabanaki advisors working on curriculum and teacher development.

Thank you for considering this important legislation for the benefit of all people who now call Maine home.