

Lelania Avila  
Mount Desert  
LD 1474

Thank you for considering this testimony. Please support the bill LD 1474.

I'm a part-time teacher in a public school, and I am committed to including Wabanaki Studies in the year-round curriculum at our district's schools. Without more support, however, it's very difficult to do, even when it is a priority for teachers.

You must already be aware of the reasons to support this bill, but just in case here they are with my additional testimony:

Teaching Wabanaki studies is the law of Maine. 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. As a part-time teacher I spend hours of personal time learning about Wabanaki studies. I often wonder how full-time teachers can possibly do this with their limited time and resources. I propose that Wabanaki Studies is as important as any of the other standard subjects in our schools.

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. This is essential to ensuring LD 291 can be effective.

LD 1474 makes Wabanaki voices integral to curricular and professional development. The bill requires the Maine Department of Education to continue funding for contracted Wabanaki advisors working with the Wabanaki Studies Specialist to create and implement professional development short-term courses for teachers. These courses must be made available to teachers throughout the state.

I have had many conversations with other teachers about this. Teachers simply can not effectively teach Wabanaki Studies without this essential support.

LD 1474 supports enrichment of Maine school resources and activities. The bill provides funds for which school administrative districts can apply to support Wabanaki Studies activities and resources.

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.

LD 1474 supports readying teachers to provide instruction in Wabanaki Studies. The bill directs the State Board of Education to adopt rules requiring the completion of a Wabanaki Studies component in the qualifications for certifying teachers.

This bill is one easy way that we can begin to build trustworthy relationships in our state, after centuries of causing egregious harm to Wabanaki people.

Please vote in favor of this bill.

Thanks, Lelania Avila