

Rich Stuart  
Wabanaki Alliance  
LD 1474

Testimony in Support of LD1474: An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools

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

My name is Rich Stuart. I am a member of the Wabanaki Alliance and a private citizen from Thomaston, Maine. I am writing in support of LD1474 for a number of reasons. For example, while teaching Wabanaki Studies in Maine has been Law in Maine since the passage of LD291 in 2001, few Maine schools have succeeded in offering a curriculum that meets the Law's criteria, as teachers struggle to find the time and resources to teach the necessary curriculum. (Refer to the full report: The Wabanaki Studies Law: 21 Years After Implementation).

LD 1474 supports a permanent position at the Maine Department of Education (DOE) to develop a Wabanaki Studies curriculum and resources for all Maine schools. By establishing the permanent position of Wabanaki Studies Specialist at DOE this bill insures that Wabanaki Studies will be essential instruction and a graduation requirement. Currently, a Wabanaki Citizen holds a significant (though not yet permanent) position.

LD 1474 importantly requires the Maine DOE to continue funding for contracted Wabanaki advisors with the Wabanaki Studies Specialists to develop short-term professional development courses for teachers throughout Maine.

LD 1474 supports an enrichment of Maine school resources and activities. This bill provides funding to which school administrative districts can apply to enhance their support of their Wabanaki Study's curriculum. Unfortunately, Maine is behind the curve in teaching Indigenous studies, compared with many other states, such as Montana, Oregon and Minnesota, who fund teams of employees to support statewide instructions for Indigenous Studies. A most meaningful first step for Maine would be to ensure proper compensation for Wabanaki advisors working on developing and implementing curriculum and teacher development.

In summary, LD 1474 provides supports readying teachers to provide instruction for Wabanaki Studies. It also direct the Board of Education to adopt rules requiring completion of a Wabanaki Studies component in the qualification for certifying teachers.

In concluding my testimony, I wanted to give you a little history as to why I am so passionate in my support of LD 1474. I have lived for 78 of my 85 years in Maine. I grew up in Brunswick, graduated from Brunswick High School, and Bowdoin College. In my pre-college education, I was required to take a Maine History course in my school system, but never once was the plight of the Wabanaki Nations of Maine mentioned in my course work. Unfortunately even in my education at Bowdoin College there was no mention of the suffering of our Indigenous neighbors. I am ashamed to say that I had no concept until a few year ago of the degree of racial injustice, and the suffering economically, culturally, socially, and the political isolation that our White ancestors perpetrated on members of the Wabanaki Nations of Maine historically, and to the full extent as to how these injustices still remain today. I believe things would have been different for me, and probably for many other Mainers like me, who came through our public school system, if we had been exposed to the curriculum proposed in LD 1474.

Thank you,  
Rich Stuart