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Testimony for **LD 1474, an Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools**

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and distinguished committee members,

I am Margo Lukens, Professor *emerita* of English, University of Maine. Since 1992 at the University of Maine, I have been involved with creating and maintaining curriculum and programs to include Indigenous literature and cultural history, beginning with helping to establish Native American Studies and the Wabanaki Center at the University of Maine. The passage of LD 291 in the year 2001 was a hopeful moment, but we have seen that legislation passed without fiscal support can be an empty requirement. Two decades later, four organizations undertook a review of implementation of the Wabanaki studies requirement—Abbe Museum, the ACLU of Maine, Maine Indian Tribal State Commission, and the Wabanaki Alliance. The findings were published in the 2022 “Wabanaki Studies Law: 21 years after implementation.” As reported voluntarily by teachers, administrators, parents and students, there is still spotty and inadequate compliance with the requirement, despite earnest attempts and desire to do better. Too many of Maine’s residents have no knowledge of the four Indigenous nations in Maine, their continuance in traditional homelands that make up the State of Maine, nor of their lifeways and cultural traditions that have strongly shaped and named the landscape. But there is a hunger for knowledge among students and teachers, and this present bill seeks to address it.

I have just returned from a visit to the Pacific Northwest, and am struck by the contrast between the position of Indigenous nations in the State of Washington and of those here in Maine. The Washington State Legislature mandated “Since Time Immemorial,” a tribal history and culture curriculum in 2015; by 2021 more than 50% of schools had begun implementation, and by the 2022-2023 school year at least 80% of schools reported incorporating content in social studies classes. The State of Maine lags woefully behind the arc of education history in this regard, and it is time for us to take the steps necessary to deliver on the promise we made to ourselves in 2001.

LD 1474 does four concrete things for the implementation of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools. **First**, it makes permanent an existing (but not permanent) position at the Maine Department of Education for a Wabanaki Studies Specialist to oversee development of

curriculum. **Second**, it provides for respectful compensation for Wabanaki advisors working with the Wabanaki Studies Specialist on training for teachers throughout the state. **Third**, it sets aside money that school administrative districts can tap to support specific activities and educational resources for Wabanaki Studies. **Fourth**, and perhaps most importantly, the act asks for pre-service teacher preparation to teach Wabanaki studies as a component of certification. There are many ways that preparation might be achieved and recognized, but it is vital that Maine teachers enter the classroom with skills and information so that they can confidently and appropriately bring knowledge about Wabanaki people and communities into Maine classrooms.

I urge the committee members to examine and support this proposed legislation, and I thank you for your attention to my testimony.

With all best wishes,

Margo Lukens