

April 22, 2025

To: The Honorable Members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

From: Melissa Prescott, 12 Walker Ave. Norway, ME 04268

Re: Testimony in Support of LD 1474

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and esteemed members of the Committee,

My name is Melissa Prescott, and I've been a Visual Art teacher at Telstar Middle School in Bethel since 2004. I'm here today to express my strong support for LD 1474.

More than 20 years ago, Maine passed a law—LD 291—requiring Wabanaki Studies to be taught in all K–12 public schools. Yet for years, like many educators, I lacked the support and training to implement it meaningfully. That changed this past year with the leadership of Brianne Lolar, the Wabanaki Studies Specialist at the Maine Department of Education. Thanks to her—and the many Wabanaki advisors she has brought together—my district, MSAD #44, now has a professional learning community (PLC) dedicated to Wabanaki Studies, which I've had the privilege to participate in and help facilitate.

Our PLC includes K–12 educators working to deepen our understanding of Wabanaki Studies and integrate that learning into our curriculum and practices. We recognize that Wabanaki history *is* Maine history—and that it has been marginalized and misrepresented for far too long. With guidance from Brianne and other Wabanaki knowledge-sharers, we've begun making thoughtful changes to include more Wabanaki voices, culture, and history in our curriculum.

LD 1474 is vital because it ensures continued progress and supports systemic change. It makes the Wabanaki Studies Specialist position permanent, compensates Wabanaki advisors for their time and expertise, and supports professional development statewide. It also directs the State Board of Education to include Wabanaki Studies in teacher certification requirements, and provides resources and funding to enrich curriculum and student experiences. Most importantly, it upholds the principle of “nothing about us without us,” ensuring that Wabanaki voices are centered in the teaching of their own histories. This bill will help new educators enter the field prepared, and give experienced teachers like me the tools and support we need to teach this content with authenticity and integrity.

LD 1474 also directly responds to the 2015 Final Report of the historic Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) —the first of its kind in the U.S. to focus on Indigenous child welfare, and the first known Truth Commission in the world to be co-created by both sides of a conflict. Recommendation #14 of the TRC's report urges the state to *“develop ways to expand on the work of...LD 291, so there is an enlarged understanding of bias and genocidal practices in the greater community and Wabanaki-state relations are held in a broader framework.”* LD 1474 is a meaningful and necessary step in that direction.

This work matters—to students, to communities, and to the future of our state. I urge you to vote **Ought to Pass on LD 1474**. Our schools, our teachers, and our students need the leadership and resources this bill provides. We will all be stronger for it.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Melissa Prescott

12 Walker Ave.

Norway, ME 04268