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LD 1474

As a former Maine teacher (I taught for 14 years at Noble High School in North Berwick) and the parent of two children raised and educated in Maine, I am writing to express my strong support for LD 1474.

Decades ago Maine enacted a law requiring public schools to teach students about Wabanaki tribes, including their territories, economic systems, cultural systems, governments, and political systems. However, its implementation has been inconsistent and uneven across school districts, and in many districts it is not followed at all.

The way American history is taught in many classrooms around the state can leave students with the impression that the USA was virtually empty when European settlers arrived and that European colonization was inevitable and beneficial. It often ignores ways in which Tribal nations' civic structures influenced the formation of US democracy, the violence of US colonization and genocide, and the current realities of Wabanaki people in Maine.

As Brad Lopes, Program Manager for the Native American Teacher Retention Initiative (NATRI) with the Mashpee Wampanoag Education Department point out, current teaching generally also ignores the fact that the U.S. Constitution recognizes four sovereigns in its own text: federal, state, foreign, and Tribal Nations. It does not equip all students to understand the trust and treaty relationship between the United States and Tribal Nations, and this further reinforces the effect of making Tribal nations seem invisible.

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.

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. I currently help lead a project with 47 schools across Washington state; in Washington, there is a state-mandated curriculum called "John McCoy (lulilaš) Since Time Immemorial: Tribal Sovereignty in Washington State", which was created by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction in partnership with the Federally Recognized Tribes in Washington State. Several other states have similar curricula, and Maine should catch up to them.

The current reality in Maine is unacceptable and damaging on many levels. It sends the message to Wabanaki students that they are invisible, and it deprives non-Wabanaki students from learning the real history of the place where they live. It also deprives them of the ability to expand their notions of how societies can be run, and to explore what American society might be able to learn from Wabanaki ways of organizing society. The passage of this bill is essential to support more effective history instruction in our schools and to prevent harm to Maine's Wabanaki students.

Thank you for your attention to this matter,  
Kate Gardoqui