

**Kate Gardoqui**

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**LD 339 - Resolve, to Provide Funds to the Maine Indian Education School District to Develop a Wabanaki-centered Curriculum**

Co-Chair Senator Joseph Rafferty, Co-Chair Representative Kelly Murphy, and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee:

I am a Maine citizen and parent, and I am writing to express my strong support for LD 339.

In 2022, non-Hispanic American Indian/Alaskan native people had a suicide rate 91% greater than the general population. ([CDC- Suicide Prevention](#)) A report published by New Mexico State University published in 2024 reported that "...the crude suicide death rate of American Indian and Alaska Native adolescents (18.95 per 100,000) was the highest of any racial/ethnic group (70.4% greater than non-Hispanic Whites, 239% greater than non-Hispanic Blacks, 284.1% greater than Asians, and 298% greater than Hispanics)." ([NMSU study finds high suicide rates among American Indian, Alaska Native children](#) 09 Dec 2024)

Tremendous harm is caused to Native youth in this country, including Wabanaki youth, by social studies curricula that perpetuate ugly stereotypes and that erase Native peoples, cultures, and contributions. It is imperative that Wabanaki students receive an education designed by Wabanaki educators to empower and uplift them. This is literally a life-and-death matter.

LD 339 requires the appropriation of \$100,000 to support the development of a Wabanaki-centered curriculum for Wabanaki students. As far as I can tell, this represents approximately 0.00086% of Maine's budget - a tiny price to pay for an essential support for these students.

Once developed, this curriculum will be a valuable resource to schools across the state. Indigenous Knowledge Systems center many concepts and practices which are increasingly being recognized as essential: as author Helen Thomas wrote in Ed Surge in 2022, "Only recently has mainstream education research realized that without authentic relationships rooted in mutual respect and understanding, meaningful and long lasting learning is nearly impossible. But Indigenous communities have always understood its impact on knowledge transfer. Indigenous ways of knowing and learning emphasize nurturing relationships not only with and among learners, but also with the larger community and the environment or place with which students spend time. All educators, whether they are Indigenous or not, can learn from these systems how to root their teaching and learning in community and place-based context." ([Indigenous Knowledge Is Often Overlooked in Education. But It Has A Lot to Teach Us.](#) Ed Surge, 2022)

Thank you for your time and attention. I hope you will do everything you can to pass LD 339.

Kate Gardoqui