

Maulian Bryant  
Wabanaki Alliance  
LD 1474

Testimony in Support of LD 1474: An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools  
Submitted by the Wabanaki Alliance

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and Honorable Members of the Committee of Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Maulian Bryant, and I am a Penobscot Nation Tribal Citizen and the Executive Director of the Wabanaki Alliance. I am honored to testify in strong support of LD 1474 on behalf of the Wabanaki Alliance.

We were established by Wabanaki Tribal leaders in 2020 to educate on the need to restore the recognition of our inherent tribal sovereignty and to advocate for policy changes to support the Wabanaki Nations in our homelands now called Maine; the Mi'kmaq Nation, the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, the Passamaquoddy Tribe at Sipayik, the Passamaquoddy Tribe at Motoskamikuk, and the Penobscot Nation.

A primary focus of our work has been amending the 1980 Maine Indian Land Claims Settlement Act; we have helped pass some important reforms and modernizations to that law.

Our vision is to increase awareness and knowledge about our people. In 2022, we worked in partnership with the American Civil Liberties Union of Maine, the Maine Indian Tribal State Commission, and the Abbe Museum to review the 2001 Wabanaki Studies law to see how it was currently being implemented. We released the report, "The Wabanaki Studies Law: 21 Years After Implementation", on Indigenous Peoples Day.

The report was a snapshot in time of how the law was being implemented in select school districts throughout the state. While a few communities taught Wabanaki Studies and were doing a commendable job, there were many others who were not meeting the standards of the 2001 law.

We did not want this to be a "gotcha" moment for these schools; we wanted to have this information so we could move forward together. The report is available on our website: [wabanakialliance.com](http://wabanakialliance.com) or I am happy to bring it for the work session.

Two important issues addressed was curriculum materials and the know-how to teach the curriculum. School leaders now have access to Wabanaki knowledge holders and they know how to teach these topics without potential misinformation or appropriation.

Since that report was issued we have witnessed the tremendous work of the Wabanaki Study Specialist in the State Department of Education. Many of our Board Members have been involved in the collaborative, innovative, and culturally accurate curriculum creation both in the MOOSE modules and the supportive projects. I have personally seen the specialist's empowering effect. This work has been effective by uplifting Wabanaki advisors and connecting them in a human way with educators..

The current model and process works, and this bill is an important step in honoring the 2001 historic achievement of visibility for our people and the education of all people here in our homelands.

The State of Maine has a long legacy of oppression of the rights of Wabanaki people. By erasing our contributions and continued presence it creates a space where the land theft, paternalism, trampling of self-determination, and mistreatment become something only we know about.

Internalizing that traumatic reality and not having others validate it has been a harsh and unhealthy consequence for our people for generations. It is not about blame or judgment now, it is about the realities of all people so that we can live in an honest and respectful state together.

The bills before you today uplift the stories, cultures, histories, and modern day

experiences of people you may not often learn about or feel connected to growing up in Maine. When you know the journey of another who was once a mystery to you it is harder to judge, hate, cast aside, or dismiss them. It is beneficial for all students to learn about all of their neighbors. By supporting LD 1474 you can ensure that the progress the Wabanaki Studies Specialist has made in resource development, Wabanaki knowledge being accessible and valued, and the uplifting benefits of everyone in Maine understanding more about the Indigenous stewards past and present. Teachers all over the state want and need these materials. We urge you to vote ought to pass.