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***Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs***

***LD 1474—An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools***

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Karen Blakelock and I am a policy advisor for The Nature Conservancy in Maine. **I appreciate this opportunity to testify in support of LD 1474, An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools.**

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Guided by science, we create innovative, on-the-ground solutions to our world's toughest challenges so that both nature and people can thrive. We use a collaborative approach that engages local communities, governments, the private sector, and other partners. The Nature Conservancy has been leading conservation in Maine for more than 60 years and is the 12th largest landowner in the state, owning and managing roughly 300,000 acres.

As an organization committed to creating a future of healthy lands, waters, and communities, we believe that one of the most effective and enduring actions we can take is to strengthen Indigenous Peoples' voices, choices, and actions. This is a major focus of TNC's work in Maine and around the world. Here in Maine, we continue to learn about the historical and ongoing injustices faced by Wabanaki children, families, and communities, and we acknowledge the urgency of addressing them. LD 1474 is yet another small but meaningful step the state can take to support the Tribes in Maine.

LD 1474 supports a permanent position at the Maine Department of Education to develop a Wabanaki Studies curriculum and resources for all Maine schools and makes Wabanaki voices integral to the education of all students across our state. Creating opportunities to understand the full history and range of impacts – especially the burdens those impacts impose on communities that have historically and continue to experience oppression and marginalization – will help current and future generations of students.

Additionally, Maine is currently lagging other states that have already implemented various Indigenous studies programs to help students understand a more complete picture about the history of their state. Montana, Oregon, and Minnesota have already implemented similar studies programs. LD 1474 is a critical step toward improving student outcomes by ensuring all Maine students are exposed to important Maine history and cultures.

We urge this committee to support LD 1472. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.