



To: Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

April 22, 2025

From: Elise Hartill, Maine Youth for Climate Justice

RE: Testimony in support of L.D. 1474: "An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools"

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Elise Hartill, and I am the Executive Director of Maine Youth for Climate Justice (MYCJ), a statewide coalition of more than 500 youth and young adults advocating for bold climate action and an equitable, sustainable future. I am writing in support of LD 1474, "*An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools*."

LD 1474 would move us toward fully implementing Wabanaki Studies in Maine school curriculum as required by the 2001 Wabanaki Studies law ( [LD291](#) ). Among other things, LD 1474 would ensure the permanence of the Wabanaki Studies Specialist position within the Maine Dept. of Education. This person would continue to guide oversight, make recommendations about curriculum and resources, help shape teacher training, and serve as an institutional structure ensuring the effective implementation of the 2001 law.

Truthful education about Indigenous Peoples improves outcomes for both Indigenous and non-indigenous students. Indigenous students are more connected to the material they're learning when they are accurately represented in it, leading to better educational outcomes and self-esteem. Non-indigenous students are better prepared to be actively engaged citizens in our democracy when they learn accurate information about the state's past and present.

Maine passed a critical law in 2001 mandating public schools teach students about the Wabanaki Nations, but this law has not been effectively implemented. Many students have graduated with little or no education about Wabanaki history, and Wabanaki students continue to be erased from their own land's history. The State of Maine and the Dept. of Education have failed a whole generation of Maine students by not implementing this law. The Dept. of Education, State Legislature, and school districts have an obligation to effectively implement the 2001 law, but educators and administrators do not have adequate support and resources to do so. The State Legislature must pass LD 1474, which will give school administrators and teachers consistent and expert guidance on what resources exist to teach Wabanaki Studies in accordance with existing law.

Maine Youth believe that as a state, we must reckon with the full context of the past and present so that we can make the best decisions for our future. This includes understanding the colonization that led to what we now call the State of Maine, and the attempted genocide, oppression, and erasure of the Wabanaki peoples. It also includes the incredible contributions that Wabanaki people have made and continue to make in this place that we all call home.

We believe passing LD 1474 is an important step towards righting these wrongs and creating a stronger generation of Maine students, better equipped to be changemakers in their communities. A core tenant at Maine Youth for Climate Justice is that a climate justice future cannot happen without Indigenous sovereignty, and Indigenous and youth leadership. The passage of this legislation is an important step to move us in the direction of systemic change and a stronger relationship between the Wabanaki Nations and the State of Maine.

For the above reasons, Maine Youth for Climate Justice urges you to vote "Ought to Pass" for LD 1474. Thank you for your time and consideration of our testimony.

Sincerely,  
Elise Hartill