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I write to you today as a lifelong educator. I myself grew up in Maine public schools and then attended Colby College. I am now a visiting professor at Colby in a department that prioritizes teaching students how to be in critical relationship with the worlds around them -- both the familiar ones and not. As a "Maine studies" researcher myself, in every course I teach, I incorporate Indigenous Studies as I find that my students have the least exposure but the most responsive learning to these critical forms of historically suppressed knowledges. I myself was not granted access to this kind of thinking and learning -- even our "Maine Studies" public education curriculum did not include anything about the Wabanaki peoples -- until I attended a private undergraduate institution. My own child is now getting this instruction in an independent K-12 Maine school. This should not be a privilege afforded only to students who attend well-resourced private/independent institutions; it should be an entitlement to all students within public education.

As you know, the law requiring that all Maine schools teach Wabanaki Studies was passed in 2001, yet many Maine schools currently integrate little to none in their curriculum. This bill would ensure ongoing progress to create and provide Indigenous-led Wabanaki Studies resources for all. This bill establishes the position of Wabanaki Studies Specialist, filled by a Wabanaki citizen, in the Department of Education and requires the DOE to continue funding contracted Wabanaki advisors across the State. This move is one small step toward funding entire teams working to support statewide instruction of Indigenous studies -- the model many other states use. Supporting this bill simply allows Maine to catch up when it comes to providing high quality public education to our residents.

On the school district side, this bill includes funding that administrative units can apply for to fund Wabanaki studies resources in their schools. It also directs the State Board of Education to adopt rules to require the completion of a Wabanaki studies component in the qualifications for certifying teachers so that all districts have these knowledgeable educators in their schools.

I urge you to support high quality, historically accurate Maine public education so that our state can thrive in the 21st century.