

April 22, 2025

Dear members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

I live in Portland and am a student in the Master of Social Work program at the University of Southern Maine. I'm writing today to urge you to **support LD 1474: An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools.**

Maine's Wabanaki Studies Law requires elementary and secondary schools to teach about Wabanaki Tribes and Nations, past and present. It became law in 2001. I grew up in Maine and attended public school here between 2003 and 2016. I cannot recall a unit in any of my classes, focused on anything related to Wabanaki Studies. (We probably read a few picture books depicting them generically and/or stereotypically, written by white people.) Despite LD 291, this experience is widespread. According to a 2022 report by the ACLU of Maine and others, the Maine Department of Education has failed to enforce or meaningfully support implementation of LD 291. They report that "school districts have failed to consistently and appropriately include Wabanaki Studies in their curriculum." Many states (Montana, Oregon, Minnesota, and others) have far greater governmental support for enforcing similar laws. Maine is failing its students.

**Passing LD 1474 is critical for helping schools comply with Maine State Law.** Part of the reason teaching Wabanaki Studies is so difficult to enforce is the lack of support for teachers and school districts, which LD 1474 would address by creating and publishing more resources. It would establish a fund to which schools could apply, ensuring that it's not just wealthy schools who are able to meaningfully comply with the law. And it would require the Maine DoE to continue working with Wabanaki advisors to ensure accurate materials of the highest quality for schools and for professional development/microcourses.

Learning about Wabanaki histories, cultures, and rights issues for the first time in college felt like finding missing puzzle pieces in my understanding of the US government and society. I'm having to go back and relearn my way through basic things I should have studied decades ago. Teaching complete and accurate history allows students to better understand the world around them, dispels oppressive stereotypes, and strengthens democracy and community. My children and their peers deserve to have confidence in their education in Maine. Please vote "ought to pass" on LD 1474.

Sincerely,

Hadriane Hatfield