

April 22, 2025

Dear Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Patti Forster, and I am a longtime educator at Camden Hills Regional High School with over three decades of classroom experience. I currently serve as president of the Maine Council for English Language Arts and am the 2021 Knox County Teacher of the Year and the 2020 Maine State English Teacher. I am writing today to testify in strong support of LD 1474: An Act to Strengthen Wabanaki Studies.

This bill represents a long-overdue and necessary commitment to honoring the histories, cultures, and contemporary experiences of the Wabanaki peoples, whose sovereign nations have stewarded this land since time immemorial. Although Wabanaki studies have been required by Maine law since 2001, implementation has been uneven across the state, often lacking in depth, authenticity, and sustained support. LD 1474 offers a thoughtful and robust path forward.

By establishing a Wabanaki studies specialist within the Department of Education, LD 1474 ensures that this work will no longer be treated as an optional or temporary initiative. It embeds Wabanaki studies firmly within the parameters for essential instruction and graduation requirements, signaling to educators and communities alike that this is a foundational component of a high-quality education in Maine.

The bill also recognizes the importance of collaboration and Indigenous leadership. Providing ongoing funding for contracted Wabanaki advisors is essential to ensuring that curriculum and instruction are developed with cultural integrity and lived expertise. This is not just good educational practice—it is an act of respect and a step toward reconciliation.

LD 1474 further acknowledges that educators need meaningful professional learning in order to teach Wabanaki studies well. Requiring the completion of a Wabanaki studies component for teacher certification and offering accessible short-term courses to educators across the state will help build the confidence and capacity necessary for sustained, thoughtful instruction. These efforts will not only improve classroom practice but also help dismantle stereotypes, reduce ignorance, and cultivate greater understanding among students of all backgrounds.

Finally, the availability of funding for school administrative units to acquire Wabanaki studies resources is a critical piece of this bill. Too often, schools lack the materials and support to implement curriculum mandates effectively. This funding empowers districts to do this work well.

LD 1474 is more than an education bill; it is a promise to future generations that the story of Maine will be told fully and truthfully, with the voices of Wabanaki people at the center. I urge the committee to pass this important legislation.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to equity in Maine education.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patti Forster". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Patti Forster