

Testimony of the Maine Council for English Language Arts

In Support of LD 1474—An Act to Strengthen Wabanaki Studies

Submitted to the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
April 22, 2025



Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee:

My name is Patti Forster, and I am the President of the Maine Council for English Language Arts (MCELA), a professional organization dedicated to advancing literacy and English language arts education across our state. On behalf of our Executive Board, I write to express our strong support for LD 1474, “An Act to Strengthen Wabanaki Studies,” sponsored by Representative Laurie Osher.

This bill represents a critical step toward fulfilling both the letter and the spirit of Maine’s existing requirement to teach Wabanaki Studies in our schools—a mandate that has been in place since 2001 but remains unevenly implemented across the state. LD 1474 addresses this gap by establishing sustainable infrastructure to support and expand high-quality Wabanaki Studies instruction statewide.

Specifically, we applaud the following provisions of the bill:

- **Creation of a Wabanaki Studies Specialist position within the Maine Department of Education** ensures that this work is not sporadic or symbolic, but sustained and strategic. This role will serve as a much-needed point of leadership, coordination, and accountability.
- **Ongoing funding for contracted Wabanaki advisors and educators** recognizes that Wabanaki people must be at the center of this work. Authentic, accurate instruction depends on the direct involvement of Wabanaki knowledge-keepers and communities.
- **Support for school administrative units to access resources and training** allows schools, regardless of size or location, to provide meaningful instruction in Wabanaki Studies and to develop culturally responsive curriculum that meets the needs of their students and communities.
- **Integration of Wabanaki Studies into teacher certification** will ensure that all educators, not just a few, are prepared to teach Maine students the full and truthful history of this place, including the contributions, resistance, and contemporary presence of the Wabanaki Nations.

As English language arts educators, we know that stories matter. They shape how students understand themselves, each other, and the world around them. For too long, the stories of the Wabanaki people have been marginalized, omitted, or distorted in our schools. LD 1474 is not simply about curriculum—it is about justice, truth, and belonging. It is about honoring the sovereignty and dignity of the Wabanaki Nations and ensuring that every Maine student—regardless of zip code—receives an education that reflects the full, complex, and living history of the land they call home.

MCELA urges you to vote **Ought to Pass** on LD 1474 and to fund it fully. This bill reflects a model of education grounded in partnership, respect, and equity. It is long overdue and absolutely necessary for Maine’s future.

With deep respect and appreciation for your work,

Patti Forster
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