

Leonid Eichfeld  
Topsham  
LD 1474

Good afternoon members of the committee, thank you for your time today. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of LD 1474, sponsored by Rep. Laurie Osher (D-Orono). I have been a teacher specializing in ecological and arts based education for several years now. Some of the most enriching and impactful lessons I've helped to facilitate have been about Wabanaki Studies. In these lessons, children have developed in wonderful ways, growing a greater historical and cultural awareness, and deepening their connection with their local ecosystems and communities. I am also deeply grateful for my professional development made possible by Wabanaki facilitators and mentors.

I think of one particularly personally impactful example. Last summer, I worked as a counselor for Brunswick-Topsham Landtrust's Cathance River Education Alliance summer camp, where Brianne Lolar, the Wabanaki Studies Specialist for the Maine Department of Education, taught truly formative lessons for campers. These lessons had an undeniable impact on campers, and staff, and enriched everyone's experience with nature and each other. I grew as an educator during Brianne's teaching, and have gratefully used the knowledge and tools I learned from her beyond CREA into my other places of work.

This access to enriching Wabanaki Studies instruction and professional training is not universal in Maine. However, LD 1474 will support the enrichment of public school resources and activities to provide these kinds of invaluable experiences for more children and educators in Maine. I strongly believe that making Wabanaki Studies an integral part of teachers' professional development is of fundamental importance, I speak from personal experience. Making the Wabanaki Studies Specialist for the Maine Department of Education a permanent position is a vital part of making Maine's schools outstanding. Ensuring proper compensation for Wabanaki Advisors working on curriculum and teacher development will bring wonderful and profound growth to Maine's classrooms and communities.

Thank you again for your time and attention,  
Leonid Eichfeld