

To: Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
From: Kelsey Ray Mills, 110 Old County Road, Bryant Pond, ME 04219
Date: April 22, 2025

RE: Testimony in support of L.D. 1474, “An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools”

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is Kelsey Ray Mills, and I am writing today as a conservation and climate adaptation professional with a Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology and Native American Studies, and a resident of the village of Bryant Pond. I am testifying in support of L.D. 1474, “An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools,” because I believe that all Maine children should have access to education about the original stewards of this land.

As someone of Wabanaki ancestry who grew up in Maine, I went through public and private schools without ever seeing my people reflected in the curriculum. It wasn't until I attended college that I even had a Wabanaki teacher in a formal educational setting. Up until that point, it was only through my own research and family teachings that I learned about our history, our languages, and our contributions in any meaningful way. What little mention there was of Indigenous peoples in school, we were regarded as distant figures of the past.

It wasn't until college that I had the opportunity to learn directly from Wabanaki professors. For the first time, I saw myself reflected in the faces of the mentors I was learning from. This experience gave me a sense of belonging that I didn't know I was missing. I often wonder how different my experience – and those of other Wabanaki youth growing up outside of our communities – would be if we were taught from a young age that our identities and histories matter.

LD 1474 is a necessary step toward fulfilling the promise of Maine's 2001 law requiring the teaching of Wabanaki Studies. The passage of this law will ensure that all students in Maine will learn about the true history of this land we now call Maine. Not only will it help to provide educators with the resources they need to teach this material, it will also help to create classrooms where Wabanaki youth feel seen and our peoples respected. Rather than being regarded as figments of the past, we will be seen as active and engaged citizens, artists, academics, and everything else the human experience has to offer.

The future of education in Maine must be inclusive and rooted in truth, which is why I urge you to support LD 1474. Thank you for your time and consideration of my testimony.

Sincerely,

Kelsey Ray Mills