

Neither for Nor Against:

L.D. 957: An Act to Integrate Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander History into the Statewide System of Learning Results

L.D. 1202: An Act to Establish the African American Studies Advisory Council and Provide Funding to Support African American Studies

Opposed:

L.D. 1474: An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools

April 22, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Noonan Murphy, and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, I am Eileen King, Deputy Executive Director of the Maine School Management Association, offering testimony on behalf of the legislative committees of the Maine School Boards Association and Maine School Superintendents Association on L.D.s 957, 1202, and 1474.

Our organizations largely support the goals of all of these bills – the Maine Department of Education and groups such as the Maine Curriculum Leaders Association have already dedicated time and resources in recent years towards integrating historically underrepresented and marginalized voices into school district curricula, and Maine school leaders continue to encourage that ongoing work. Our associations generally believe that if local schools are provided with proper funding, state guidance and support; and high-quality curricula, they can implement these goals with fidelity and effectiveness. However, we do have particular concerns about the specific language and requirements included in each of these bills (highlighted below), which we believe could hinder their effectiveness and lead to unintended consequences.

L.D. 1202

L.D. 1202 would continue the work that began four years ago with the passage of L.D. 1664, which integrated African American Studies and Genocide into the state's System of Learning Results.

At the time that the legislature debated that law, our organization and others expressed concerns about imposing on our schools another curricular mandate – particularly one without the requisite funding to properly implement these standards into our local curricula. L.D. 1202 would appear to offer some of that support through the creation of an Advisory Council to help advance the goals of the 2021 bill. We appreciate that some of the \$1 million in funding would help select and identify high-quality educational materials and also look for opportunities for additional funding to further implementation of these resources.

However, school leaders shared their general feeling that one of the biggest barriers towards implementation has simply been a lack of high-quality curriculum, and our associations believe that more of the funding in this bill should be specifically targeted at designing that high-quality curriculum and sharing it. If that

curriculum is made available, schools districts will use it – but they need strong state guidance and support. More funding directed towards that singular goal will help improve the effectiveness and implementation of African American Studies statewide.

L.D. 957

We also believe that L.D. 957 contains a worthy goal to expand the perspectives of Maine students and expose them to a more diverse array of stories and historical knowledge. However, this is a curricular mandate, and we are concerned that L.D. 957 would require curricular development across the state without any additional resources. We have seen how similar efforts in the past – such as the 2001 Wabanaki Studies law – have resulted in poor implementation due to wavering state commitments, and our associations are concerned that this bill could be met with a similar fate, as local districts may struggle to implement it without strong funding to develop curriculum and share it with teachers and curricular leaders in every school district.

L.D. 1474

School boards and superintendents are largely in support of much of L.D. 1474, which would create permanent positions within state government to create curriculum for educators to use to implement Wabanaki Studies in their classrooms. The bill also requires looking for additional funding and support to help local districts. As described earlier, our state has struggled for years to implement any additional curricular requirements due to a lack of state investment, and we fully believe that this additional funding in this bill – if sustained – will allow educators across the state to achieve the goals set forth by the legislature decades ago.

However, we are opposed to this bill due to its requirement for the State Board of Education to “*adopt rules to require the completion of a Wabanaki studies component in the qualifications for certifying teachers in accordance with sections 13012-A and 13013.*” At the moment, Maine schools are already facing a severe educator workforce shortage, and the state board is already working with the field to adopt new rules that we hope will strengthen the teaching profession and offer new pathways for certification. We worry that adding another additional requirement for aspiring educators could represent another barrier potentially keeping them from pursuing these vital, important careers, and for that reason, we are opposed to this bill.

Despite that one area of opposition, superintendents and school boards are in support of new efforts to strengthen knowledge of Wabanaki Studies among both students and educators, and we particularly appreciate that the bill would provide funding for Wabanaki advisors to create short-term courses for teachers across the state, offering teachers high-quality curriculum that they can use in their classrooms. This is the approach that we believe the state should take towards improving Wabanaki instruction – not adding additional certification requirements on to teachers.