

To: Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

From: Roz O'Reilly, Orono

Date: 22 April 2025

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

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

My name is Roz O'Reilly, and I live in Orono and am a senior at Orono High School.

I am testifying in support of L.D. 1474 "An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools" because I believe Maine students deserve a complete education that includes the history and ongoing presence of the Wabanaki Nations.

It wasn't until I was a sophomore in high school—taking a Wabanaki History and Culture class at the University of Maine—that I first learned the true story of Thanksgiving. My Penobscot professor shattered the simplified "pilgrims and Native Americans" narrative I'd been taught in elementary school. Since then, I've had to independently deconstruct my colonial mindset and relearn the authentic stories of the Wabanaki people whose land I live on.

This learning process has completely transformed me—from changing how I view something as everyday as the food on my plate to deepening my understanding of systemic oppression. I'm trying to help other students begin this journey too. Last spring, I led a discussion with biology students at a nearby high school where we planted native plants in their pollinator garden. As we discussed the plants' importance for the ecosystem and their medicinal value to the Wabanaki, I quickly realized these students couldn't identify who the Passamaquoddy or Penobscot people were. Our education system had failed them, just as it had failed me.

If the Wabanaki Studies Specialist position proposed in this bill had existed during my early education years, I wouldn't have had to do this work on my own. No Maine student should have to wait until college—or independently seek out information—to learn about the Wabanaki and their continuing presence on this land. Even though LD 291 made Wabanaki studies mandatory back in 2001, many schools still aren't teaching it sufficiently, if at all.

This bill takes real steps to fix that by funding a specialist position, supporting Wabanaki advisors, creating resources for schools, and making sure teachers are prepared to teach this

content. Maine students deserve to know the real history of the land they live on and its traditional stewards. The truth cannot wait another generation.

For these reasons, I respectfully encourage you to support L.D. 1474. Thank you for your time and consideration of my testimony.

Sincerely,

Roz O'Reilly