

To: Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

From: Laura Hepner, Belmont, Maine

Date: April 22, 2025

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

My name is Laura. I am seventeen and a public high school student. As a non-Indigenous student, citizen, and community member, it is very important to me to learn the full history of the land that has been my only home. I have had the opportunity outside of school to learn about and from Wabanaki people. This has strengthened the connection I feel with this place, and has opened my eyes to the responsibility I have as someone who loves Maine to be conscious of the lasting impacts of colonialism in my state and community. Learning this history (and even more importantly about the current struggles of Wabanaki communities) is the only way I can begin to find my place in building a better way forward, away from the continuation of colonialist ideology, and towards working collectively for a more just society. Learning about the Wabanaki continues to bring me eye-opening perspectives on home that have changed my life, and it shocks me that the way I was taught about Indigenous people in school did not portray them as modern people with real current challenges. All students should have access to this eye-opening and important learning experience.

This change must begin at the root of the issue: by teaching accurate social studies that incorporate Wabanaki Studies, and that do not just paint Indigenous people as historic. Wabanaki Studies is already in the law (required by LD 291 which was passed in 2001) but many schools including my own don't have the resources to incorporate it into the curriculum without support. I therefore urge the committee to pass LD 1474 in order to provide funding to strengthen the teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine schools.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my testimony.

Sincerely,

Laura

Laura Hepner
Belmont
LD 1474

To: Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
From: Laura Hepner, Belmont, Maine
Date: April 22, 2025

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

My name is Laura. I am seventeen and a public high school student. As a non-Indigenous student, citizen, and community member, it is very important to me to learn the full history of the land that has been my only home. I have had the opportunity outside of school to learn about and from Wabanaki people. This has strengthened the connection I feel with this place, and has opened my eyes to the responsibility I have as someone who loves Maine to be conscious of the lasting impacts of colonialism in my state and community. Learning this history (and even more importantly about the current struggles of Wabanaki communities) is the only way I can begin to find my place in building a better way forward, away from the continuation of colonialist ideology, and towards working collectively for a more just society. Learning about the Wabanaki continues to bring me eye-opening perspectives on home that have changed my life, and it shocks me that the way I was taught about Indigenous people in school did not portray them as modern people with real current challenges. All students should have access to this eye-opening and important learning experience.

This change must begin at the root of the issue: by teaching accurate social studies that incorporate Wabanaki Studies, and that do not just paint Indigenous people as historic. Wabanaki Studies is already in the law (required by LD 291 which was passed in 2001) but many schools including my own don't have the resources to incorporate it into the curriculum without support. I therefore urge the committee to pass LD 1474 in order to provide funding to strengthen the teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine schools.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my testimony.

Sincerely,
Laura