



Permanent Commission RACIAL, INDIGENOUS & TRIBAL POPULATIONS

LD 1202 “An Act to Establish the African American Studies Advisory Council and Provide Funding to Support African American Studies ”

April 22, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee On Education and Cultural Affairs:

My name is Rae Sage, and I am the Policy Coordinator for the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations. The Permanent Commission’s role is to examine racial disparities across all systems and advise Maine State Government on ways to improve the status and outcomes of historically disadvantaged racial, Indigenous, and tribal populations.

The policy committee of the Permanent Commission supports LD1202, in the understanding that accurate and culturally relevant African American Studies is a long overdue feature of statewide curriculum. Historical documents show that enslaved African people were present in Kittery as early as 1663.¹ Maine students of every race, background and zip code deserve an accurate, honest and quality education that introduces them to the diversity of this nation and prepares them to go anywhere they choose. Providing intentional resources for schools to teach African American Studies grants students and teachers a greater perspective on what it means to be a Mainer, American, and human being.

Maine law requires that African American Studies be included in the content standards.² Despite this, as observed with the implementation of Wabanaki Studies, it is not enough to simply update the standards without systems of accountability and metrics for success. Successful implementation requires intentional resources, including teacher training and a content specialist that provides curriculum support to educators and schools.

¹ Wall, Patricia Q. (2017). *Lives of Consequence: Blacks in Early Kittery & Berwick in the Massachusetts Province of Maine*. Portsmouth: Portsmouth Historical Society.

² 20-A MRSA §4706, as amended by PL 2021, Chapter 247

This bill aims to create and fund an African American Studies Advisory Council within the Department of Education. Composed of teachers, scholars, and stakeholders. This advisory council will support educators, administrative units and the public by offering both online and on-site programming related to the state's African American history.

African American Studies is an essential subject, deserving of a robust and consistent curriculum that benefits all students. In being taught accurate information about the past, African American Mainers are also empowered to understand all the ways that they too have deep relation to Maine. The understanding that we belong here, have roots here, have stories here and can grow here is transformative knowledge. Echoing the words of The Department of Education's 2020 Joint Statement, "We urge all Maine schools and educators to accept their role and responsibilities in examining and addressing the inequities that have long existed in our society and institutions."³

An education rooted in understanding our shared history is foundational to lasting societal change. Providing resources, solid guidance, and ensuring that our goals are met in teaching African American Studies is essential to making Maine a better place for all of us. Thank you very much for your time.

³ Joint Statement of Commitment and Support for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Maine Schools (December 2020)
<https://mainedoenews.net/2020/12/11/joint-statement-of-commitment-and-support-for-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-in-maine-schools/>