



Permanent Commission RACIAL, INDIGENOUS & TRIBAL POPULATIONS

LD 1474 “An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools”

April 22, 2024

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.

I am here today to give testimony in full support of LD 1474, as the policy committee of the Permanent Commission supports legislation that advances truth in education in relation to historically marginalized communities.

LD1474 creates necessary systems of accountability and provides resources to support educators and schools in integrating Wabanaki Studies into their curricula.

Since 2001, many Maine educators have worked hard to integrate Wabanaki studies into their curriculum with notable successes. In Portland, Wabanaki Studies have been integrated into earth sciences, ecology, life sciences, and sustainability at multiple grade levels. In Old Town, Wabanaki Studies is incorporated into their fourth-grade curriculum regarding science, engineering, and “Changing Land”.¹

¹ The Wabanaki Studies Law: 21 Years After Implementation (October 2022).
<https://www.wabanakialliance.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/2022-10-3-Wabanaki-Studies-Law-Report-Digital-final.pdf>

However, the October 2022 report “Wabanaki Studies Law: 21 Years After Implementation” it is also noted that:

- The current Wabanaki Studies Law is not meaningfully enforced across the state,
- School districts have failed to consistently and appropriately include Wabanaki Studies in their curriculum, and
- Teacher Training and professional development remain insufficient to equip educators to teach Wabanaki Studies.

LD 1474 would bolster efforts to support, grow, and share successes by permanently establishing the position of Wabanaki Studies Specialist in the Maine Department of Education and requiring the DOE to continue funding contracted Wabanaki advisors to guide the specialist. The most effective models of teaching Wabanaki Studies include working directly with Wabanaki community members. Centering Wabanaki voices is essential to acknowledging their vibrant culture at every intersection of Maine’s existence, past, present, and future.

Centering diversity and truth in education gives young people the tools to become conscious participants in their community. It gives them the perspective to consider the experiences and stories of those different from themselves, including their own peers. Public education paints how we see the world and understanding Wabanaki studies is foundational to understanding Maine. Investing in resources to support culturally appropriate and accurate curriculum nourishes all who call Maine home.

Thank you.