

To: Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

From: Margaret Sobol, 23 Meadowbrook Ln., Portland, ME 04102

Date: April 22, 2025

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

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

My name is Margaret Sobol and I am the district outdoor educator for Falmouth Public Schools, and I live in Portland, ME. I am testifying in support of L.D. 1474, "An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools," because I believe that Wabanaki Studies is essential knowledge for every Maine student.

When I transferred my teaching license to Maine more than a decade ago and began teaching in Portland there was no mention of LD 291 in my new teacher program or at my new school. I had only a vague sense of what the word Wabanaki even meant. It wasn't until a Wabanaki parent asked me why Wabanaki history and culture wasn't being taught to her son that I realized the issue at hand. I wasn't prepared to answer her question, let alone provide culturally appropriate instruction for him and his classmates. Soon, though, thanks to the work of that parent and the work of Fiona Hopper, Portland Public Schools would become a leader in developing curriculum and educating faculty. A Wabanaki parent shouldn't have had to ask for that when it had been law for nearly 20 years already.

Fast forward a few years to my move to Falmouth Public Schools where I discovered a district without the benefit of someone coordinating the effort to support teachers and implement L.D. 291. Many teachers across the district had never heard of LD 291. As we began to have the conversation, the number one reason I heard for lack of implementation was that teachers didn't feel that they had the knowledge and resources to do it well. I did my best to support them, staying connected with Portland, continuing to educate myself and cautiously gathering resources. Unfortunately, what I experienced in Falmouth is not unique. Many school districts across the state are still struggling to meet the requirements of LD 291.

The creation of the Maine Department of Education Wabanaki Studies program has been a game changer. Brianne Lolar, the Wabanaki Studies Specialist, and an entire network of Wabanaki educators have worked tirelessly to create content, gather culturally appropriate resources and provide training. It is critical that this position and the work it seeks to do be supported so that the students of Maine may have a more equitable, just and rich educational experience.

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

Sincerely,

Margaret Sobol