

Etta Hughes
Belfast
LD 1474

To: Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

From: Etta Hughes, 85 Edgecomb, Belfast, 04915

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 Etta Hughes, I live in Belfast, and I am a 17-year-old senior at the Ecology Learning Center. I am a non-indigenous person in strong support of the bill to strengthen Wabanaki studies in Maine schools.

For far too long, education in the United States has ignored a crucial part of our country's history: the peoples who lived here for tens of thousands of years before European settlers arrived. The way that young people far too often learn about the Indigenous peoples of the United States paints them as victims of conquest who were quickly wiped out. This dangerous narrative not only erases the humanity of these people and the generations of wisdom their history carries, but also ignores the fact that they still live on today. When education fails to acknowledge and teach the history of these people, it creates citizens of the United States with a false understanding of the creation of their own country, and a lack of connection to the land in which they live.

In 2001, a Maine law was passed to enforce Wabanaki studies in schools across the state. However, this law did not come with adequate provision to actually facilitate its realization. This new bill would help provide the network necessary to actually make teaching Wabanaki studies across the state feasible, thus helping thousands of children and teenagers receive the education to understand a crucial part of the context in which they live.

As a student that currently attends a Maine public school that does have a Wabanaki Studies program I can tell you how beneficial it has been to my education. Not only have those classes given me a poignant understanding of the context of my home state and country, but they have also opened my eyes to so many rich traditions, cultures and ways of life that I would have never considered otherwise. Wabanaki Studies has given me not only a deep appreciation and respect for the original people of Maine, but has also more deeply rooted me within this place, showing me the wonderland of possibilities within the place that I call home. Learning about the Indigenous people of Maine has given me not only a better understanding of history but also helped me to better understand the present. I have a better comprehension of the issues that the Wabanaki people face today, more awareness of the challenges that all minority groups experience, and a more dynamic perspective of modern life as we know it. Perhaps the biggest realization within this part of my education is the fact that it is possible for humans to exist in harmony with the land— and even that humans can be an integral part of nature. So often, in this age of innovation and technology, we lose connection to the physical landscape around us. We lose connection to the people who came before us, and we do not take the time to imagine a different future in which we can integrate lessons from both our Wabanaki predecessors and our Wabanaki present-day fellow citizens. I can say with complete confidence that because of the Wabanaki studies at my school I am a more informed citizen with a more nuanced understanding of the world around me. I deeply hope that other members of my generation can be given an opportunity to have the same realizations and deeper understanding that Wabanaki studies has given me.

I stand with great hope to see this bill passed. Thank you for your time, and for considering this testimony.

Sincerely,
Etta Hughes