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MEJ Testimony in *Support* of LD 1474, An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools

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Good afternoon, Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. My name is Dina Malual and I am a Policy Advocate with Maine Equal Justice (MEJ), a nonprofit legal aid provider working to increase economic security, opportunity, and equity for people in Maine. We are pleased to testify in support of LD 1474.

Despite a law requiring schools to teach Maine k-12 students about Wabanaki history, economic and political systems and culture, the Maine Department of Education (DOE) is not doing enough to enforce the decades-old law. Many districts have failed to appropriately and consistently include Wabanaki Studies in their curriculum. LD 1474 implements changes that support an inclusive curriculum that highlights the importance of Wabanaki tribes in Maine.

LD 1474 supports a permanent position at DOE to develop Wabanaki Studies curriculum and resources for all Maine students. The permanent position ensures long term changes to be inclusive of Wabanaki history.

In addition to a permanent position within DOE, LD 1474 provides funds for which school administrative districts can apply to support Wabanaki Studies activities and resources. In comparison to other states, Maine is behind. Funding ensures appropriate teacher training and professional development to support educators.

This bill aims to work with the Maine Department of Education by implementing direct support for educators. LD 1474 also requires the completion of a Wabanaki Studies component as part of teacher certification.

By working with teachers directly and creating positions within DOE to provide guidance and support for educators, students k-12 will understand the importance of Wabanaki tribes and their contributions to the state. We have the power to ensure that the next generation has access to an inclusive education.

For these reasons, we ask that you vote “Ought to Pass” on LD 1474.