



**TESTIMONY OF GLBTQ LEGAL ADVOCATES & DEFENDERS
IN SUPPORT OF
LD 957, LD 1202, AND LD 1474
Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
April 25, 2025**

Dear Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and Members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders (GLAD Law) is a nonprofit legal organization that works in New England and nationally to create a just society free of discrimination based on gender identity and expression, HIV status, and sexual orientation. We appreciate the opportunity to submit this testimony in support of LD 957, An Act to Integrate Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander History into the Statewide System of Learning Results; LD 1202, An Act to Establish the African American Studies Advisory Council and Provide Funding to Support African American Studies; and LD 1474, An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools.

For decades, scholars and educators have recognized the value of a “windows and mirrors” approach to teaching.¹ A school curriculum can serve as a “mirror,” reflecting a student’s own cultural, ethnic, religious, gender, or racial backgrounds back to them, which allows them to feel that their identity is valued. A curriculum can also serve as a “window” into other identities and traditions, which allows students to grow in their understanding of people with different backgrounds.² These window and mirror effects are all the more important when young people have few opportunities to see their lives, culture and history mirrored back to them or shared with their peers.

In this way, a racially inclusive and culturally responsive school curriculum can foster a sense of belonging and community among students. This contributes to a positive school climate where all students can learn and grow in a respectful and supportive environment. Inclusive curricula and positive school climates are associated with lower rates of bullying and discrimination and increased acceptance of minority groups.³

¹ See Emily Style, *Curriculum as Window and Mirror*, Listening for All Voices, Oak Knoll School Monograph (1988); see also Rudine Sims Bishop, *Mirrors, Windows and Sliding Glass Doors*, Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom 9-11 (1990).

² K.M. Jackson, *When Diversity Isn't the Point: Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors in the Classroom*, Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education 54, 55 (2023); see also Bishop, at 9-11.

³ See, e.g., Nat'l Education Ass'n, *The Very Foundation of Good Citizenship: The Legal and Pedagogical Case For Culturally Responsive and Racially Inclusive Public Education for All Students* 15 (explaining how exposure to multicultural curriculum reduces racial prejudice); Antonya M. Gonzalez et al., *Reducing Children's Implicit Racial Bias Through Exposure to Positive Out-Group Exemplars*, 88 Child Development 123, 123, 215 (2017) (age

School curricula that highlight the lived experiences of marginalized community members are also associated with increased educational achievement for all students. “[N]umerous studies have found an association between culturally inclusive education and student GPA, school attendance, academic credits earned, student mathematics performance, standardized test performance, and graduation rates” for all students.⁴

Finally, racially and culturally responsive school curricula promote democratic values and fulfill the key “role and purpose” of the public school system: to “prepare pupils for citizenship in the Republic.”⁵ Schools must equip students with the knowledge they need to participate in our democracy and to succeed in an increasingly diverse society. This means exposing students to a wide range of divergent viewpoints, developing students’ critical thinking skills, and teaching students how to communicate across racial and cultural differences. Adopting a multiracial, multicultural curriculum would support students’ development in each of these critical areas and better prepare them to lead Maine into the future.⁶

In sum, these bills support the safety, wellbeing, and academic achievement of all Maine’s students. They advance equal educational opportunity for underrepresented Mainers. And they prepare Maine’s young people to succeed in adulthood. For all these reasons, GLAD Law respectfully urges this committee to support the inclusive school curriculum goals articulated in LD 957, LD 1202, and LD 1474.

Sincerely,

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appropriate stories about Black exemplars improved openness to Black people); Patricia Favazza & Samuel L. Odom, *Promoting Positive Attitudes of Kindergarten-Age Children Toward People with Disabilities*, 63 *Exceptional Children* 405 (1997) (kindergarten children who spent time with and read books about people with disabilities showed greater acceptance of people with disabilities); Shannon D. Snapp et al., *LGBTQ-inclusive curricula: why supportive curricula matter*, 15 *Sex Education* 580, 587 (2015) (reporting less bullying and increased student safety with LGBTQ-inclusive curricula).

⁴ Nat’l Education Ass’n, *supra* note 3, at 14; *see also* Organisation for Econ. Co-operation and Dev., *Equity and Inclusion in Education: Finding Strength through Diversity* 248 (2023) (“Research indicates that a positive school climate promotes students’ abilities to learn . . . with a number of studies having shown that school climate is directly related to academic achievement, at all school levels”).

⁵ *Bethel Sch. Dist. v. Fraser*, 478 U.S. 675, 681 (1986).

⁶ Nat’l Education Ass’n, *supra* note 3, at 1, 6–7, 11, 14–15.