



Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Testimony in Support of:
*L.D. 1202, An Act to Establish the African American Studies Advisory Council
and Provide Funding to Support African American Studies*

April 22, 2025

Dear Senator Rafferty, Representative Noonan Murphy, and distinguished members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is Gia Drew, and I am the Executive Director of EqualityMaine, which has been advocating on behalf of Maine's LGBTQ+ community since 1984. We strongly support L.D. 1202, An Act to Establish the African American Studies Advisory Council and Provide Funding to Support African American Studies.

Maine played a sizeable role in the slave trade and the exploitation of African Americans, and a considerable part of the state's wealth in the 19th century came from engagement with the slave trade particularly by way the shipping industry.¹ Despite the near-mythical status of Joshua Chamberlain, the Underground Railroad, and Harriet Beecher Stowe in many people's understanding of Maine history, the fact is that our state had a longstanding entanglement with and investment in the dehumanization of African Americans and Indigenous people. It is therefore especially necessary to invest in and advance our ability to provide the inclusive and meaningful education that Maine law already requires.²

It is critical for students to see themselves reflected in their studies - it fosters a sense of belonging, validates their identities, and promotes higher engagement and academic success.³ Analyzing and challenging dominant narratives and perspectives is an important way to increase student engagement, critical thinking skills, and empathy. And, by incorporating diverse perspectives, experiences, and narratives into curricula, schools can create a learning environment that is inclusive, engaging, and empowering for all students.

Establishing and investing in an African American Studies Advisory Council to serve as a resource to educators, schools, and the Department of Education is needed by students, educators, and indeed all of our communities - including future generations of Mainers. We respectfully urge the Committee to vote "Ought to Pass" on L.D. 1202.

Thank you,

Gia Drew (she/her)

¹ Warner, Stacey. "Maine's Involvement in the 19th-Century Economy of Enslavement." *Amjambo Africa*, 7 May 2021, www.amjambofrica.com/maines-involvement-in-the-19th-century-economy-of-enslavement/.

² www.mainelegislature.org/legis/statutes/20-a/title20-Asec4706-2.html.

³ Heineke, Amy J., et al. "Using Texts as Mirrors: The Power of Readers Seeing Themselves." *The Reading Teacher*, 26 July 2022, doi:10.1002/trtr.2139.