



Permanent Commission RACIAL, INDIGENOUS & TRIBAL POPULATIONS

LD 1642 “An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools”

January 09, 2024

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee On Education and Cultural Affairs:

My name is Rae Sage, and I am the Policy Coordinator for the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations. The Permanent Commission's role is to examine racial disparities across all systems and advise Maine State Government on ways to improve the status and outcomes of historically disadvantaged racial, Indigenous, and tribal populations.

I am here today to give testimony in full support of LD 1642, as it creates necessary systems of accountability and provides resources to support educators and schools in integrating Wabanaki Studies into their curricula.

Since 2001, many Maine educators have worked hard to integrate Wabanaki studies into their curriculum with notable successes. In Portland, Wabanaki Studies have been integrated into earth sciences, ecology, life sciences, and sustainability at multiple grade levels. In Old Town, Wabanaki Studies is incorporated into their fourth-grade curriculum regarding science, engineering, and “Changing Land”.¹

However, the October 2022 report “Wabanaki Studies Law: 21 Years After Implementation” it is also noted that:

¹ The Wabanaki Studies Law: 21 Years After Implementation (October 2022).

<https://www.wabanakialliance.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/2022-10-3-Wabanaki-Studies-Law-Report-Digital-final.pdf>

- The current Wabanaki Studies Law is not meaningfully enforced across the State
- School districts have failed to consistently and appropriately include Wabanaki Studies in their curriculum, and
- Teacher Training and professional development remain insufficient to equip educators to teach Wabanaki Studies.

LD 1642 would bolster efforts to support, grow, and share successes by creating a Wabanaki Studies Commission to support school administrative units and educators. The most effective models of teaching Wabanaki Studies include working directly with Wabanaki community members. Centering Wabanaki voices is essential to acknowledging their vibrant culture at every intersection of Maine's existence, past, present, and future. LD 1642 would also require the Department of Education to take an active role in considering the implementation of Wabanaki Studies. The Department of Education would take a representative sample of schools around the state, evaluate their programs, and publish their findings every five years in order to avoid finding ourselves in the same situation in another 20 years.

We wish to acknowledge some recent progress made at the Department of Education by engaging with a Wabanaki Studies Specialist. This has helped create progress and momentum by bringing together the guidance and support that Maine educators want and need.² It is necessary to continue providing this important resource so that schools and educators have the support they need to develop appropriate local curriculum.

Centering diversity and truth in education gives young people the tools to become conscious participants in their community. It gives them the perspective to consider the experiences and stories of those different from themselves, including their own peers. Public education paints how we see the world and understanding Wabanaki studies is foundational to understanding Maine. Investing in resources to support culturally appropriate and accurate curriculum nourishes all who call Maine home.

Thank you.

² <https://www.maine.gov/doe/innovation/wabanakistudies>