

Testimony in support of LD 1642
An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools

January 9, 2024

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

My name is Katie Donlan, I live in Portland, and I am testifying in support of LD 1642, “An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools.”

I am proud to say that I attended Maine Schools in the Portland Public School District from 1999-2012. I attended Lyseth Elementary School, Lyman Moore Middle School, and Deering High School. I have much gratitude for my education in Maine’s public school system.

Unfortunately, Wabanaki Studies was not a part of my education. In elementary school, I remember hearing romanticized narratives of faraway tribes in the Southwest. We did not learn about the Wabanaki Nations, the Indigenous peoples who have called this region home long before my family and I have.

In my sophomore year social studies class, we were shown the 1992 film *The Last of the Mohicans*, based upon the novel by James Fenimore Cooper, without context or critical discussion. Later, I learned how this nineteenth century novel-turned Hollywood film both celebrates Columbus and perpetuates the myth of the “vanishing Indian.” I learned that Cooper’s novel rose to popularity during the Jacksonian period in US history, marked by the violent forced removals of Indigenous peoples.

In my education, I was mistakenly taught that Indigenous peoples were distant from Maine, both in space and time. It was not until I actually left Maine, for college and later postgraduate studies, that I grappled with the colonization of the place I call home, as well as the survival and enduring resilience of the Wabanaki Nations as sovereign peoples.

Now, over ten years later, I am overjoyed to hear of Portland Public School’s successes, working in collaboration with the Wabanaki Nations to teach Wabanaki Studies. However, I also know that implementation remains uneven across the state, and many districts and teachers are left without the appropriate support and resources.

Therefore, I urge you to support this bill, to strengthen the teaching and implementation of Wabanaki Studies in Maine schools. All students deserve the opportunity to learn about, critically engage with, and understand the place they call home. Thank you for your time.

Katie Donlan
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