



DATE: Jan. 9, 2024
TO: Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs
FROM: Samantha Warren, UMS Director of Government & Community Relations
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RE: **LD 1642, An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools**

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs: My name is Samantha Warren and I am the Director of Government Relations for the University of Maine System (UMS) and a proud alumna of the University of Maine at Farmington and the University of Maine. I am writing on behalf of UMS to inform your consideration of LD 1642, *An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools* (as amended by the sponsor). I know you will also hear from other members of our university community who have lived experience and extensive history working directly to strengthen and grow Wabanaki Studies teaching and learning, and who believe that State accountability and tracking of implementation is important.

Maine's public universities are the state's largest producer of classroom-ready teachers, having awarded nearly 4,000 education degrees or certificates in the past five years. Among our six State-approved educator preparation programs are Maine's only to have achieved national accreditation (UMaine, UMF and University of Southern Maine). Seven of the past 10 Maine Teachers of the Year are proud UMS graduates including the 2024 Maine Teacher of the Year and USM alum, Joshua Chard, who recently noted, **"A robust and affordable public university system is at the heart of educational equity."**

Our educator preparation programs take seriously their responsibility to be a resource to both pre- and in-service teachers in the state, and also school and district administrators and other partners. As a 2022 report and this legislation remind us, there is still much work to be done together to realize the full potential of the landmark 2001 Wabanaki studies law (sponsored by UMaine alumna and current UMS Trustee, the Hon. Donna Loring), including to equip educators to **meaningfully teach Wabanaki Studies and to integrate Wabanaki Studies into all content areas.**

As this Committee is well aware, the path to teacher certification in Maine is well-defined and requires a very specific series of courses (detailed in State Board Rule Chapter 115), to which our State-approved educator preparation programs align. Currently, there is no "teaching of Wabanaki Studies" requirement as part of this sequence.

In recognition that more needed to be done to support Maine educators teach Wabanaki Studies and leveraging the expertise of faculty in its Native American Programs, last year **UMaine launched a semester-long, three-credit "Teaching Wabanaki Studies" course that will be a requirement for all teacher education students** effective this fall. This course, developed by John Bear Mitchell, a citizen of the Penobscot Nation and a lecturer in Wabanaki Studies, is designed to provide students with lesson plans and supplementary materials that they can take with them into their own classrooms that span the subjects taught in elementary and secondary

schools, including math, science and engineering, health, language arts and social studies. As John Bear has noted, "Indigenous knowledge is broad, and the curriculum has to reflect that. We exist in every single subject." The course also covers how to create additional lessons and connect them to the Maine Learning Results.

UMaine is currently the only educator preparation program in our System that offers and requires a specific course in the teaching of Wabanaki Studies. It is important to note that when the flagship added this requirement, it had to remove an existing requirement of an equal number of credits to ensure students did not have to take more than the required 120 credits to earn their four-year teaching degree. For example, for elementary education majors, this course requirement replaced one of their social studies electives.

Other universities in the System require teacher candidates to take content relevant courses. For example, at the University of Maine at Augusta, teacher education majors are required to take Native American Cultures II or Wabanaki Studies as part of their general education requirements. Meanwhile, some USM teacher candidates participate in Wabanaki REACH workshops and USM also integrates Wabanaki Studies into social studies methods courses.

Dawnland: Maine Indian History Microcredential

Our System has also partnered with John Bear to create **the Dawnland microcredential**, a self-directed online course exploring the history of Maine tribes. Since being launched in November 2022, more than 700 people have completed the course and earned the Dawnland badge.

All UMaine and UMA teacher education students are required to obtain this microcredential prior to their student teaching and fee is covered within their regular tuition, However, others (including in-service teachers) have to pay \$25 to offset a portion of the System's costs associated with administering the microcredential including licensing of the badging platform and technical support. **The Legislature may wish to consider providing UMS some State appropriation to subsidize the Dawnland microcredential so it can be made available to all Maine educators**, as we regularly receive requests from districts to offer it for free.

Our universities' educator preparation programs also regularly host summer institutes. In 2022, more than 120 educators participated in the UMaine Summer Educators Institute, which included a Wabanaki Studies strand, and a summer institute for teachers of grades 3-12 at USM's Osher Map Library K-12 focused on teaching with maps, with an emphasis on Maritime New England, and African American and Indigenous perspectives.

Finally, I would like to remind the Committee that **UMS offers a Native American student tuition waiver and also subsidizes room and board** for those who qualify. Last year, 506 students benefited from that waiver, with \$2.7 million waived by our System. By ensuring our public universities are accessible to Indigenous students, we hope to increase their representation in Maine's educator workforce.

In summary, Maine's public universities are a resource to Maine schools as they integrate Wabanaki studies into teaching and learning. Given this, we appreciate the opportunity to be included in the Commission proposed by LD 1642 and welcome your questions.