



Maine Conservation Voters

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Testimony of Maine Conservation Voters in Support of LD 1642
"An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools"
Before the Education and Cultural Affairs
January 9, 2024

Good afternoon Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. I am Beth Ahearn, Director of Government Affairs at Maine Conservation Voters, a statewide non-profit organization with 13,000 members and supporters building a just, thriving future for all by acting on the climate crisis, protecting the environment, and safeguarding our democracy. We support measures to make Maine more just, equitable, and democratic.

Today we support LD 1642, *"An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools,"* which would finally bring all Maine schools up to the standard set by the 2001 *Wabanaki Studies Law*. Enacted almost a quarter-century ago, this visionary law requires schools to teach Maine K–12 students about Wabanaki territories, economic systems, cultural systems, governments, and political systems, as well as the Wabanaki tribes' relationships with local, state, national, and international governments.

Regrettably, a 2022 analysis found that the Wabanaki Studies Law is not meaningfully enforced and its vision has not been realized. Too many Maine students have graduated with little or no education about the Wabanaki Nations, and Wabanaki students have continued to be erased from the history of their own homeland.

As a state and country, we must learn the full context of the past and present in order to make informed decisions about the future. This includes understanding the colonization that led to the creation of the place we now call Maine; the genocide, oppression, and attempted erasure of the Wabanaki; and the many contributions the Wabanaki people have made and continue to make to this place we all call home.

LD 1642 would move us toward fully implementing Wabanaki Studies in the Maine school curriculum, in part by reinstating the Wabanaki Studies Commission to guide oversight, make recommendations about curriculum and resources, help shape teacher training, and serve as an institutional structure ensuring the effective implementation of the 2001 law. We know that educators and administrators teaching Wabanaki history and culture often need more access to resources and support to do so.

Learning the complete history of Indigenous people is essential for all of us: students and teachers, Wabanaki citizens living in their homeland, and non-Native residents of the place we now call Maine.

Please vote "Ought to Pass" on LD 1642.