



STATE OF MAINE
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SPEAKER'S OFFICE
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002
(207) 287-1300

RACHEL TALBOT ROSS
SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

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Testimony of Speaker Rachel Talbot Ross presenting
**LD 2001, An Act to Establish the African American Studies
Advisory Council and Require Funding for African American
Studies**

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Good afternoon Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Rachel Talbot Ross. I represent House District 40 in Portland, and I serve as Speaker of the House. Thank you for the opportunity to present **LD 2001, An Act to Establish the African American Studies Advisory Council and Require Funding for African American Studies.**

This bill comes to you as part of a larger movement to include the teaching of African American history in instruction on Maine and American history, a project to which I have been committed since I first joined the Legislature. Growing up in Portland as an African American 9th-generation Mainer, I accessed the history of my African and African American descendants in this state through my father, Gerald E. Talbot. He learned, through his own volition, about the history of African Americans and Africans in Maine and New England; he collected and preserved material objects, conducted his own textual research, and passed on these stories to all who expressed interest.

He understood then what I understand now: that these stories have not been made sufficiently visible in the telling of Maine's history, and that it is essential that we rectify their omission. For example, the story of the mixed-race community on Malaga Island and its forced removal, Maine's role in the Atlantic slave trade – it is critically important that our students learn about these historical truths, because to know where we're going, we have to know where we've been. By ensuring that a complete and accurate body of voices and stories is included in the telling of Maine's story, we can move forward as a more informed and empathetic people.

Last session's LD 1664, An Act To Integrate African American Studies and the History of Genocide into the Statewide System of Learning Results, which was signed into law on June 16, 2021, was a critical step in this direction. LD 1664 required the Department of Education to include instruction on African American studies and Maine African American studies in the Maine Department of Education's required units of instruction on American history and Maine studies, in addition to requiring the inclusion of instruction on the history of genocide. Since the passage of that bill, we have understood the next step to be ensuring both support and accountability around its implementation. It is critical that teachers be furnished with the resources, instruction, and support they need to teach this important material, and that we ensure that it is properly taught.

I'd like to deeply thank the Department for the work that they have undertaken in implementing LD 1664. To date, they have convened multiple advisory groups to develop learning modules on this topic area, as well as additional resources for educators. These learning modules are being piloted this academic year. They have also included African American Studies in the current proposed revision of the Science and Social Studies Maine Learning Results, which will be presented to this committee as the Chapter 132 rules revision. I thank them for this work, and for their partnership moving forward as we build on that foundation.

This bill ensures that support and accountability by doing the following five things, which I'll describe briefly and then with more depth. This presentation is based on work with the Department and stakeholders, and the revised language will be forthcoming.

- First, it creates a position for a full-time content specialist within the Department, who would be tasked with the facilitation and coordination of the work described in this bill;
- Second, it creates the African American Studies Advisory Commission within the Department of Education, which would be tasked with advising the Department upon the development of curriculum and its implementation;
- Third, it instructs the Department to establish an annual professional development institute for teachers who are tasked with teaching African American history, and to provide targeted funding for further professional development opportunities in teaching within this area;
- Fourth, it directs the Department to increase focus on African American studies within the established Department of Education review of the Learning Results content standards, to provide outreach to school administrative units with support and technical assistance for curriculum development and implementation, and to convene a Task Force to review these concepts and their incorporation into the certification process;
- Fifth, it requires the Department to provide for the Advisory Commission and the Legislature a biennial report, which includes a summary of a representative sample of the audits conducted by schools with regards to their progress on incorporating African

American studies into their curriculum **and** a summary of the Department's efforts in conducting outreach to schools to collect this information.

I'll now explain each point in more detail.

First, it creates a position for a full-time content specialist within the Department, who would be tasked with the facilitation of the work that is laid out in this bill. This specialist would have knowledge of and expertise in African American teaching standards and curriculum, and they would be responsible for the facilitation of the Advisory Commission, the coordination of professional development opportunities for teachers on African American studies, including the annual institute, and the implementation of the biannual review process. By dedicating a full-time content specialist to this work, we would ascertain both the expert facilitation of this work and the cohesion and organization of these multiple efforts.

Second, the bill establishes the African American Studies Advisory Commission, which will include public school teachers, experts on writing curriculum and on teaching African-American history, and a representative of a civil rights organization. The Commission will assist school administrative units and educators in the exploration of a wide range of educational materials and resources relating to African American studies, and will advise the Department on African American studies curricula and the implementation of teacher education. Commission members will be provided stipends as remuneration for their work, and they will serve terms of three years. This Commission will thus convene subject-matter experts and practitioners within the Department so that their insights can directly inform the Department's work; in so doing, we will ensure that the design and implementation of curricula are expert-driven;

Third, the bill directs the Department to establish and fund teacher education programs and teacher professional development programs, including an annual teacher institute, in African American studies and Maine African American studies. The bill also requires the department to provide ongoing funding for the inclusion of African American studies in teacher preparation programs and school administrative units, including funding that school administrative units can apply for to fund African American studies resources. In fulfilling these steps, the Department will play an active and consistent role in the ongoing professional development of the teachers tasked with teaching this material, and will help to ensure that teachers tasked with teaching this material are fully prepared, year after year.

Fourth, it directs the Department to increase focus on African American studies within the established Department of Education review of the Learning Results content standards, and to provide outreach to school administrative units with support and technical assistance for curriculum development and implementation. The Department would also be required to convene a Task Force on African American Studies Teacher Preparation, which would include

representatives of the higher education system, the State Board of Education, and the Department of Education, would ensure that we are able to move thoughtfully and intentionally towards the inclusion of foundational African American teaching skills in the teacher certification requirement.

Fifth, it requires the Department to provide for the Advisory Commission and the Legislature a biennial report, which includes a summary of a representative sample of the audits conducted by schools with regards to their progress on incorporating African American studies into their curriculum **and** a summary of the Department's efforts in conducting outreach to schools to collect this information. By furnishing this report every two years, the Department will ensure both that one report is issued in time for each legislative session and that Commission members, who serve three-year terms, will see the fruition of their work prior to the end of their terms. This report will provide an important measure of accountability in ensuring equitable representation of African American voices, an accurate account of African American history and culture, and sufficient outreach by the Department to individual school administrative units.

These steps, should they be codified, will take up this Legislature's commitment to the full and accurate telling of Maine's story in our education system and facilitate its robust and equitable fulfillment. Once again, I'd like to thank the Department for their ongoing cooperation in this effort, and the Committee for its ongoing attention to this work. I urge you to support this bill, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Policy goals for **LD 2001: An Act to Establish the African American Studies Advisory Council and Require Funding for African American Studies**

	DoE content specialist	Stakeholder working group (DoE, SBOE, Higher Ed teaching programs)	Learning Results Advisory Council	Funding
DoE content specialist position with knowledge and expertise in AfAm standards and curriculum	X			X
Establish and fund advisory board with stipends to follow implementation of standards, local SAU curriculum support, and to make recommendations to DoE in relation to both professional learning and Learning Results standards review			X	X
Build inclusion of foundational AfAm teaching skills within teacher certification requirements	X	X	X	
With targeted funding, develop, and manage professional learning opportunities for teachers with focus on AfAm studies, including an annual professional learning institute.	X			X
Increase focus on AfAm studies within established DoE review of the Learning Results content standards	X		X	
Provide outreach to SAUs with support and technical assistance for curriculum development and implementation	X			X
Survey representative statewide sampling of SAU curricula and report biennially to DoE and legislature on the extent of AfAm curricular development	X		X	