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January 11, 2024

Testimony of Representative Laurie Osher in support of
**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 Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. I am Laurie Osher, and I represent House District 25 in Orono. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of **LD 2001, An Act to Establish the African American Studies Advisory Council and Require Funding for African American Studies**, sponsored by Speaker Rachel Talbot Ross.

I came before you earlier this week to present my own bill, LD 1642, An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools. While the details of my bill and the Speaker's bill differ, there are important parallels – both in the reasons it is so important to teach our students these subjects and in the ways we as legislators can ensure existing law is implemented effectively. I respectfully urge the committee to pass both bills.

We teach our students social studies and history because we recognize that, as citizens of this state and country, we must learn the context of our past and present in order to create a more just society and to make informed decisions about the future.

That context includes the experience and stories of African Americans and African American Mainers.

Right now, this perspective is missing from our classrooms. African American students rarely see themselves accurately represented in their studies, and students of all backgrounds complete their education without gaining the knowledge they need to fully understand our history and the

context of our present day. Maine students should be learning about African American history; about the triumphs and discrimination that African Americans experience.

People whose ancestors came from the African continent have lived here in the land we call Maine for hundreds of years, including before the state's founding. African Americans helped create settlements here and laid the foundations for the future of the state in various ways, from social to economic to cultural. There were more African Americans in Portland in 1870 than in 1900. And yet, the existence of an African American community there that was large enough to build and maintain its own church is not something Maine students learn about while attending Maine's public schools. Without including the stories of the history and lives of African Americans here, the narrative that there are very few black people here and its evil twin – that they do not belong here – is perpetuated.

LD 2001 will address this educational gap by giving schools and educators the tools and resources they need to teach our students about the history and culture of African Americans. As with LD 1642, the proposed bill is designed to ensure the curricula are well developed and teachers have the support needed to deliver the material.

Thank you for your consideration. I am happy to answer any questions and to assist the committee in any way.