

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is Kaya Lolar. I am a citizen of the Panawahpskek Nation, senior at Harvard University, and former student of the Maine public school system. I am here today to testify in support of LD 1474, “An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools.”

I have spent countless hours on a bus between Boston and Bangor; after my classes concluded for the week, I’d more often than not come back home to Maine to visit classrooms and help facilitate workshops for educators. Over these past few years, I’ve developed strong relationships with educators all across the state, and as a result, have become acutely familiar with their various needs and asks regarding the teaching of Wabanaki Studies.

I have heard nothing but raving reviews of the DOE’s Wabanaki Studies Specialist and all that has become available, and even possible, since this position has been established. The MOOSE modules that our Specialist was initially hired on to create in partnership with other educators and advisors have now become only the tip of the iceberg. Tens of dozens of resources have been built, including 19 interdisciplinary educator guides, each complete with a series of lessons and activities relevant to the educator’s grade or area of expertise and the learning standards that they are required to fulfill. Professional development workshops have been held in nearly every county in the state, including cohort-style workshop series’ to widen the reach of every effort with only one Specialist to shoulder these demands. LD 1474 would ensure that this much needed work is continued—so that the needs of our educators currently being met *continue* to be met, and that the needs that aren’t will soon be.

It is also crucial that the Department continues to compensate Wabanaki knowledge sharers for their contributions to this work. This work could not be what it is without the efforts of many advisors from each of the Wabanaki Nations. At its core, Wabanaki Studies is a representation of the flourishing communities still here today and cannot be taught as such without the voices of many from within these communities. Many other states are miles ahead in their own implementation of local Indigenous studies and have entire teams within their Departments of Education whose job it is to support educators and students within this realm. Ensuring that we have a Wabanaki Studies Specialist and can appropriately compensate a group of Wabanaki advisors through their contracted work is a necessary beginning step for us as we stand here on Wabanaki land discussing the strengthening of a practice that is long overdue.

It has been written in law that Wabanaki Studies must be taught in all Maine schools since one year before I was born, and here I stand, a month away from graduating college, fighting to make this a reality. This should not be the case. For this reason, I strongly urge the Committee to support LD 1474.