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Senator Rafferty
3 State House Station,
Augusta, Maine 04333

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Dear Senator Rafferty and Committee,

My name is Nadine Bravo and I am an educator in Maine. My journey to understanding the vital importance of Indigenous cultures began with confronting my own past ignorance. As an ESOL educator, I recognize the profound significance of language and culture in shaping identity, a reality that became particularly clear upon learning about the Indigenous nations who have called this land home for millennia.

To address this knowledge gap and become a more effective educator in my community, I pursued a graduate certificate in Native American Studies at Montana State University, focusing on Federal Indian Law, the Indian Education for All initiative, and common misconceptions about Native cultures. This education now informs my work, and I recognize that my initial unawareness is likely shared by many. Therefore, I strongly support LD 1474.

As educators, we are committed to collaborating with our tribal communities, the Wabanaki Nations – the Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, Mi'kmaq, Maliseet, and Abenaki – who have called this land home for millennia- to build trust and honor their historical and cultural values, striving for equitable opportunities for all students. Integrating Wabanaki Studies is crucial for demonstrating support for the sovereignty of the Wabanaki Nations. Maine's existing "Wabanaki Studies Law" is vital for fostering understanding, combating stereotypes, and ensuring that Indigenous students see their cultures reflected and valued in their education. Furthermore, Wabanaki Studies provides all students with a more complete and accurate understanding of Maine's history, acknowledges the invaluable contributions of the Wabanaki people, promotes

environmental stewardship, and counters "place ignorance" by highlighting their continuous presence and self-governance. Teaching the truth about the Wabanaki dismantles stereotypes and promotes a nuanced understanding of their history and culture, empowering place-based education and emphasizing the interconnectedness of humans and nature – all of which fosters empathy, respect, and informed citizenship.

Despite the existence of the Wabanaki Studies Law since 2001, consistent implementation remains a significant challenge. LD 1474 aims to rectify this by expanding resources and establishing a permanent Wabanaki Studies Specialist position within the Maine Department of Education. The bill also mandates continued funding for contracted Wabanaki advisors, ensuring that Wabanaki voices are central to the development of curriculum and professional development for educators. Maine currently lags behind other states. Many states (like Montana, Oregon, and Minnesota) have strong teams of state-funded employees working to support statewide instruction of Indigenous studies. Specifically, LD 1474 includes funding for school resources and, importantly, directs the State Board of Education to require the completion of a Wabanaki Studies component as part of the qualifications for teacher certification.

I strongly support the key provisions of LD 1474 that focus on:

- Requiring the completion of Wabanaki Studies as a condition of teacher certification.
- Making the Wabanaki Studies Specialist position within the Maine Department of Education permanent.
- Ensuring continued funding for contracted Wabanaki advisors to develop and deliver professional development for educators.

For these compelling reasons, I urge you to support LD 1474.

Sincerely,

Nadine Bravo

References

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