

Testimony of the Committee on Indian Relations of the Episcopal Diocese of Maine
In Support of LD 1474 An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine
Schools,
Sponsored by Rep. Laurie Osher

Sen. Rafferty, Rep. Murphy, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs; my name is Richard Farnsworth, and I am a member of the Committee on Indian Relations of the Episcopal Diocese of Maine. On behalf of the Committee on Indian Relations, I ask you to vote Ought to Pass on LD 1474.

On June 15, 2001, Governor (now Senator) King signed into law LD 291, which became Chapter 403 of Maine Public Laws of 2001. This law required that all Maine schools teach Maine Native American history and culture. Citizens of Wabanaki Nations and their supporters had great hopes in 2001 that this law would usher in a new era of Maine education in which all Maine students would learn Wabanaki studies in their schools and would have greater understanding of the Wabanaki peoples and their parts in Maine history and culture.

On Indigenous Peoples Day 2022, the Abbe Museum, the ACLU of Maine, the Maine Indian Tribal-State Commission (MITSC), and the Wabanaki Alliance released a report titled "The Wabanaki Studies Law: 21 Years After Implementation" which documented the failure of the Department of Education to ensure that all school districts in Maine incorporate Wabanaki Studies into their curricula. Despite significant efforts by some staff members in the Department of Education, numerous Wabanaki citizens, a few school districts, and some individual teachers, we remain to this day far from fully realizing the promise of LD 291. Far too many Maine students, entering school after LD 291 became law in 2001, graduate from high school knowing little or nothing about their Wabanaki neighbors.

LD 1474, the bill before you today, would make significant steps toward the full implementation of Maine Studies in Maine schools. It would establish a position and duties of Wabanaki Studies specialist in the Department of Education, require annual reports to the commissioner and the Maine Indian Tribal-State Commission, require meaningful inclusion of Wabanaki Studies in Maine's Learning Results across academic disciplines, require the Department to periodically study the implementation of Wabanaki Studies in schools, and require that teachers have training in Wabanaki studies. All these requirements would aid implementation of Wabanaki Studies and are long overdue.

The Episcopal Committee on Indian Relations advocates for Wabanaki Studies as an important part of our mission "to deepen our relationship with the Wabanaki of Maine, to stand with the tribes in the pursuit of justice, to affirm their inherent sovereignty, and to support the preservation of Native languages and culture." The Episcopal Committee on Indian Relations was formed by resolution of the Diocesan Convention in 1991, on the eve of the quincentennial (500th anniversary) of Christopher

Columbus' arrival in the Caribbean Islands and his expedition's first encounters with Indigenous peoples there. The delegates to that Diocesan Convention were aware that our Wabanaki neighbors had a very different understanding of our shared history, both within Maine and throughout the Americas.

Passage of LD 1474 would move the residents our state a few steps further in understanding that shared history. We urge you to vote Ought to Pass on LD 1474. Thank you for your consideration of our testimony!