



**maine environmental
education association**

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Maine DOE Legislative Team
State House Station #23
Augusta, Maine 04333

To the Standing Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Sulwan Ahmed, and I am the Community Engagement Resident at the Maine Environmental Education Association (MEEA). MEEA is a nonprofit statewide professional network representing over 2,000 educators in Maine, including classroom teachers as well as community-based educators. I am pleased to submit comments today on behalf of MEEA in full support of LD 1474, "An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine."

For over forty years, at MEEA we have supported Maine educators in providing high quality, locally relevant, environmental, and place-based education for youth. Over the past couple of years, the feedback we've received from educators requesting access to quality Wabanaki Studies resources and professional development opportunities has been at an all time high. We conduct an extensive survey sent to all schools in Maine and to community organizations engaged in outdoor learning called the Census for Community Based Environmental Learning. In our last survey Wabanaki Studies was our most requested professional development topic by educators. To respond to this need, we have been incredibly fortunate to share the abundance of wonderful resources created by the Department of Education's Wabanaki Studies Specialist, Brianne Lolar, with our network of educators, and we regularly collaborate with Brianne to offer extensive, cohort-style professional development for educators across the state. In collaboration with Brinane Lolar we have trained over 200 teachers in the past 18 months.

It is crucial that the Department ensures a permanent place for the position of Wabanaki Studies Specialist at the state level. The teaching of Wabanaki Studies is required by law for all Maine schools, yet this mandate has gone unfulfilled in most schools for over two decades since the initial law was passed. Having a position within the Department to provide support for all educators, schools, and districts as well as access to quality Wabanaki Studies resources ensures that the statewide inclusion of a comprehensive Wabanaki Studies education is an attainable goal. In fact, Maine is currently behind the curve as far as the implementation of local Indigenous studies

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goes. Many states have whole teams of people actively working towards a more fruitful version of the goal we have set for ourselves in Maine. Creating a permanent position for one Wabanaki Studies Specialist and ensuring proper compensation for the contracted work of a group of Wabanaki advisors would be a necessary beginning step towards the benchmark set at the national level.

At MEEA, we recognize the Wabanaki as the first peoples of this land that we care for today, and we see the importance of a strong Wabanaki studies education for all students. Our organization is deeply committed to building more just and sustainable communities through the power of education. Thank you for your work in advancing education in Maine and for your consideration of our comments on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Sulwan Ahmed
Community Engagement Resident
Maine Environmental Education Association