



# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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March 12, 2021

**Testimony of Representative Kyle R. Bailey in Support of LD 453  
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs**

Sen. Daughtry, Rep. Brennan and distinguished members of the Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of “An Act To Establish a Permanent Appointment of a Member of the Wabanaki Tribes to the Board of Trustees of the University of Maine System.”

Most people born and raised in Maine are rightfully proud of this fact. In fact, Mainers have developed phrases and expressions around this identity. For example, if you’re not from here, you’re from “away.” Even those born here might not be *real* Mainers because, as the saying goes, “just because a cat has kittens in the oven don't make ‘em biscuits.”

Some of you have parents, grandparents or great grandparents who were born here. Your Maine origin story may date back further, perhaps even to colonial times more than 245 years ago.

Rep. Newell’s family has lived here for thousands of years.

The Wabanaki people were the “First Mainers” and would be the dominant population in these lands today had they not been violently slaughtered and removed and inflicted with foreign disease by white European colonists from away; and, had it not been for centuries of persecution and discrimination by my, and most of your, white ancestors who sought to control, contain and diminish the Wabanaki population through policy, policing, public health and public schools.

According to NCSL’s State-Tribal Institute, Native students perform two to three grade levels below their white peers in reading and math; they are 237% more likely to drop out of school; and, they are 207% more likely to be expelled than white students. Only 7 of 100 Native American kindergartners will earn a bachelor's degree while 34 of 100 white kindergartners will.

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We must grapple with this history of violent institutional racism and the resulting socioeconomic inequalities and disparities that persist.

Today's public hearing and the deliberation by this Committee on LD 453 is part of a larger conversation about history, hard truths and our path forward. It is consequential because representation matters. The Maine House has made seats available in its chamber to Representatives from the Wabanaki tribes. Surely, we can make seats available to Representatives from the Wabanaki on state boards and commissions where important decisions are made that directly impact the lives and native lands of First Mainers. This includes the Board of Trustees that oversees Maine's land grant University and institutions across Maine that now occupy native Wabanaki lands.

To be clear, this conversation is not about pointing fingers. Blame, shame and guilt will not help a single Wabanaki teenager earn their high school diploma or adult to obtain their college degree. Opening a permanent seat for the Wabanaki tribes on the UMS Board of Trustees will help us reach for these better outcomes, together, by ensuring that the voices and perspectives of the Wabanaki are heard in UMS policy and budget decisions. Thank you.