

FRIENDS COMMITTEE ON MAINE PUBLIC POLICY

Committee on Tribal-State Relations
129 Chesterville Hill Road
Chesterville, ME 04938

To: Senator Daughtry, Representative Brennan, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

From: Wayne Cobb, 147 Allen Avenue, Portland ME 04103
Member, Friends (Quaker) Committee on Maine Public Policy

RE: **LD 453, 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**

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of LD 453 on behalf of the Friends Committee on Maine Public Policy. The Friends Committee is a statewide network of Quakers who are focused on public policy issues in Maine, with a principal concern to strengthen tribal-state relations. The Friends Committee supports LD 453 and asks your Committee to unanimously vote “ought to pass.”

Participation on the UMaine System Board of Trustees by Indigenous persons and other members of color has been sporadic at best up to now. Terms of membership have been cut short for various reasons. No Wabanaki person has had a seat on the Board since 2016. We strongly believe that diversity of membership will strengthen the Board of Trustees and the University System, making it more representative of the State as a whole and symbolizing a welcoming attitude toward students and faculty of color.

A Wabanaki member of the Board would help focus attention on the Native American Tuition Waiver and Scholarship Program, originally designed to increase the recruitment and retention of Native students. This program has suffered from funding cuts, limiting its ability to fully manifest its mission. Likewise, a Wabanaki board member’s perspective could contribute to the broader issue of retention of Wabanaki students throughout the System. In addition, a permanent Wabanaki member could help assure that the promise of LD 291, An Act to Require Teaching of Maine Native American History and Culture in Maine Schools, be fulfilled through the Board’s support for its full implementation.

Finally, a memorandum of understanding in 2018 was agreed to between the University and the Penobscot Nation regarding the care and management of Tribal-related cultural resources held by the University. Similar agreements within the UMaine System could and should be negotiated with the remaining three federally recognized Tribes in Maine, where applicable. A Wabanaki member on the Board could help bring this to fruition.

We urge you to diversify the University of Maine System Board of Trustees in a way that honors the unique status of the Wabanaki peoples in Maine and vote **ought to pass on LD 453**.

Thank you.

Wayne Cobb
Portland

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Thank you.