

Hearing date: March 12, 2021

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

Testimony by John Maddaus, on behalf of the Committee on Indian Relations of the Episcopal Diocese of Maine

Senator Daughtry, Representative Brennan, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is John Maddaus, and I am speaking in favor of LD 453 on behalf of the Committee on Indian Relations of the Episcopal Diocese of Maine. The Committee on Indian Relations has been working since 1991 to improve relationships between Episcopalians and other Mainers who are descendants of settlers and the Wabanaki peoples who are descendants of the original inhabitants of Maine. We believe that all people are loved by the One who created us all, and that all people, including those indigenous to this place, deserve to be treated with respect, and to have their voices heard, when decisions are being made that affect their lives.

I am also associate professor emeritus in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Maine in Orono. While on the faculty at the University of Maine, I chaired the committees that designed the Native American Studies program in 1994-96, and that selected the first director of that program in 1996-97. I also worked to incorporate Maine Native American history and culture into the curriculum of our pre-service teacher education programs.

LD 453 would ensure that there is always a representative of the Wabanaki tribes on the University of Maine System Board of Trustees. Although Wayne Newell (Passamaquoddy) and Bonnie Newsom (Penobscot) served on the Board of Trustees in 2006 - 2011 and 2011 - 2016, respectively, the current membership of the Board of Trustees does not include anyone from the Wabanaki tribes. The tribes are seeking to strengthen government-to-government relations with the State of Maine, and many Mainers are responding in support of improving tribal-state relationships and overcoming past misunderstandings and conflicts. Having representation on key state decision-making bodies, such as the University of Maine System Board of Trustees, would ensure that the views and concerns of

tribal governments were adequately represented in the deliberations of these bodies.

Among the issues that the UMS Board of Trustees will be dealing with in the future, and that impact Wabanaki people and tribes, are the following:

- The University of Maine System Board of Trustees created the Indian Tuition Waiver and Scholarship Program in 1972. The Board modified the tuition waiver and scholarship program in 2009, including converting the scholarship to a need-based grant starting in 2012. In recent years, there have been eligible Wabanaki students who have not been able to complete their degrees. The causes of their departures before completing their degrees are not fully understood, and further steps to improve Wabanaki student retention and degree completion still need to be taken.
- In 2001, the Maine Legislature passed LD 291 An Act to Require that Maine Native American History and Culture be Taught in all Maine Schools, and Gov. King signed this bill into law, becoming Chapter 403 of the Maine Public Laws of 2001. This law created the Wabanaki Studies Commission, consisting of 15 members, including one member appointed by the University of Maine System. The Wabanaki Studies Commission's final report, in 2003, contained recommendations for further action by various state and tribal entities, including 4 broad and 14 specific "Action Steps by the University of Maine System". But the UMS Board of Trustees has done little to implement these recommendations. Much remains to be done to strengthen teacher and school administrator preparation, and professional development for practicing educators, so that they can implement LD 291 in their classrooms and schools. The curriculum of our entire educational system, both PreK-12 schools and institutions of higher education, should reflect the diverse social fabric of our state and nation.
- Natural resources and economic development are priorities for tribal governments. UMS campuses have taken some steps to collaborate with the Wabanaki tribes on research and begin incorporating Wabanaki perspectives into the appropriate disciplines. Some progress has been made by Native American Programs at UMaine in collaboration with the School of Forest Resources and other units,

largely funded through federal grants, but much more needs to be done to incorporate Wabanaki perspectives into campus curricula and into UMS efforts to address economic development in our state.

- Kirk Francis, Chief of the Penobscot Nation, and Susan Hunter, then-president of the University of Maine, signed a memorandum of understanding on May 10, 2018, regarding the care and management of Penobscot Nation cultural resources held by the University of Maine. Such an agreement should be negotiated between the University of Maine System and all four federally recognized tribes in Maine, should the tribes deem it appropriate.

- The University of Maine System is approaching its first One University institutional accreditation by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). The NEASC accreditation process covers a variety of issues, including institutional arrangements to meet the needs of students from diverse backgrounds. It is critical that the accreditation report accurately reflect the experiences of citizens of the Wabanaki tribes and tribal governments in their relationships with the System and its campuses.

For similar reasons, there should also be a Wabanaki citizen as a member of the Maine Community College System Board of Trustees.

Existing law requires that “In making appointments [to the UMS Board of Trustees], the Governor shall strive to achieve a membership which is representative of the population of this state. Insofar as feasible when selecting qualified nominees to the board, the Governor shall consider affirmative action criteria, professional education and experience and an equitable geographic representation among the members.” The current membership of the Board consists entirely of people who are visibly White. There is no one on the Board who represents the 7% of the state’s population (according to the most recent available estimate of the U.S. Bureau of the Census) who are Indigenous, Black, Hispanic, other people of color, or mixed race. Adding a permanent position for a citizen of the Wabanaki Tribes would ensure that the Board would always have at least one person who does identify as non-White and who would offer other perspectives on all the issues which come before the Board.

We urge you to vote in favor of LD 453. Thank you.