



STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
23 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, ME 04333-0023

JANET T. MILLS
GOVERNOR

PENDER MAKIN
COMMISSIONER

May 10, 2021

Senator Joseph Rafferty, Co-chair
Representative Michael Brennan, Co-chair
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Dear Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and Members of the Joint Committee,

The purpose of LD 1664, An Act To Integrate African American Studies into American History Education is to ensure African American studies is included in the teaching of both American and Maine history. It also seeks to support educators throughout Maine by convening an advisory group to develop resources and guidance aligned with Maine Learning Results for Social Studies (MLRSS).

It is the responsibility of the Maine Department of Education and the Maine State Legislature to provide State level learning standards. The Maine System of Learning Result (MSLR) is a set of standards, or endpoints, for students. These standards ensure that learning expectations are consistent for all students, regardless of geography. It is the local school boards' responsibility, with the education professionals in their local school districts, to determine the curriculum they will use to ensure their students meet the state level learning standards. Curriculum is the day-to-day set of lessons educators develop within the framework of a school's curriculum to guide students to meet the standards articulated in the MSLR. The Department continues to support the MSLR with its standards, and further continues to support the authority of local school districts to establish curriculum locally.

The Maine Learning Results for Social Studies highlight major enduring themes that can serve as a framework to connect concepts, topics, and facts across district curriculums. The teaching of African American studies is aligned with the current MLRSS enduring themes of "unity and diversity" and "freedom and justice" and integrating African American Studies into the MLRSS would ensure that these important enduring themes would be reflected in the teaching of both American and Maine history. The effective date of July 1, 2023 aligns with the timeline of the next revision of the MLRSS which will allow for the most effective and in-depth alignment of this bill with the work of standards revision.

The importance of teaching about African American studies also aligns with the vision of the Maine Department of Education. This is evident in the collection of resources that the Department has curated for the teaching of African American studies as well as the diverse book lists intended to support the teaching of this important topic. While the Department has already initiated some of the work outlined in this bill, we look forward to continuing to support this in the creation of an integrated, project-based, pk-12 progression of learning modules on African American culture and history in Maine's Online Opportunities for Sustained Education (MOOSE). The MOOSE platform brings together teams of educators who work with content

experts within the Department as well as outside organizations to build engaging and authentic online learning. We believe that this resource, and the revision of the MLRSS, will provide the framework that school administrative units need to create and implement a social studies curriculum in their schools that will help to ensure Maine students learn about the cultural systems and experiences of African Americans in both American and Maine history.

The Department appreciates the importance of engaging people with personal experience with, and organizations who are committed to, this content, which is why our standards review process includes membership on the steering committee and why the MOOSE project reaches out to these individuals and organizations when creating learning materials involving their content. Additionally, we believe in the expertise of Maine's educators and administrators who we regularly seek out to, not only advise the work we do, but lead it. We believe in the importance of collaboration particularly when involving content of historically marginalized groups, but we do not believe this bill should mandate the membership of an advisory committee.

The Department looks forward to sharing more information about the MOOSE platform, recently revised MLRSS, the process of revising the Maine Learning Results, or any of the resources that we have already developed that support the teaching of African American studies as presented in LD 1664 and will be happy to answer any questions during the work session.

Sincerely,

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Beth Lambert
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Beth Lambert
Director of Innovative Teaching & Learning

DocuSigned by:
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Joe Schmidt
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