



SIERRA CLUB

MAINE CHAPTER

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To: Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
From: Becky Bartovics, Legislative Team Volunteer, Sierra Club Maine
Date: January 9, 2024
Re: Testimony in Support of to LD 1642: **An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools**

Dear Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

We present these comments on behalf of Sierra Club Maine, representing over 22,000 supporters and members statewide. Founded in 1892, Sierra Club is one of our nation's oldest and largest environmental organizations. We work diligently to amplify the power of our 3.8 million supporters and members nation-wide as we strive towards combating climate change; conserving our land, air, and water; and promoting a just and sustainable economy. We are writing to urge you to vote "ought to pass" on LD 1642, **An Act to Strengthen Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools**, as amended.

LD 1642 would correct an inconsistency in our support for educators and allow for the implementation of Wabanaki studies as required by the 2001 law [LD 291](#). Although the schools are mandated to teach about this, since the 2001 law was passed, there are [not the resources and support for educators to comply](#). With the reestablishment of the Wabanaki Studies Commission, resources will be made available to school districts and teachers that support verifiable and consistent information. While engaged educators may individually be bringing materials to classrooms at present, providing active support for these educators will enable them to provide improved place based education that is much more successful at engaging all levels of students.

Learning about Wabanaki history not only helps to integrate tribal students into the educational system but leaving it out presents a blank space in history for all of us. Understanding the background history of the names we encounter, of the environmental landscape that represents the thousands of years of Wabanaki stewardship inherent in what we now call Maine, helps engage students in history and in developing creative natural resource solutions to emerging issues across the state.

Where I live on North Haven Island, we are engaged in measuring shell midden erosion, and returning artifacts to Wabanaki hands. To enable the school to be involved with this work would bring a much greater understanding of the significance of artifacts found on our

beaches. Being in touch with the early history of our community, which has many families who trace ancestors to early occupation, brings a much deeper understanding of the relationships they had. Please vote "ought to pass" on LD 1642 as amended.

Respectfully submitted

Becky Bartovics
Legislative Team Volunteer
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