

LD 1642 (HP 1052)

An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine  
Testimony by Doug Bird, Orono

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan

I am testifying in support of LD 1642 as a member of MUUSAN, the Maine Unitarian Universalist State Advocacy Network, which works to educate and organize for a more just society.

I was born in Waterville, Maine, in 1949. I went to Riverside Elementary School, which used to be just up the road from here; graduated with honors from Waterville High School in 1967 and Bowdoin in 1971. I remember the Maine Studies we did in 8th grade and trying to draw the emblem on the state flag (a subject for another committee). I don't remember studying anything about our native brothers and sisters in Maine or anywhere else other than a passing mention of the "Trail of Tears" in American History in high school.

Part of the family story was that my father's mother's mother's mother was half Mi'kmaq. I have traced my father's family back to Mars Hill so it seems like a possibility.

I was deprived of a fuller understanding and cultural awareness of my heritage because of the lack of education about the Wabanaki in the public schools.

My Unitarian Universalist belief in the inherent worth and dignity of all people and the interdependent web of life require education about all cultures. Providing a thorough K-12 education of Wabanaki history and culture that preceded colonization and continues today is a must that the state recognized on June 21, 2001, and is codified as 20-A M.R.S. § 4706(2).

A few years ago, as a retiree, I met with some of the Mount Desert Island School System (MDIRSS) staff to talk about Wabanaki studies implementation. They were in the process of developing a scope and sequence for Wabanaki studies, and it is now on the MDIRSS website.

Last spring, I met with the current MDIRSS Director of Teaching and Learning (K-6), as well as the Team Leaders for Grade 3 and Grade 4. Wabanaki Studies is being taught by some of the teachers in K-6.

A good place to start is to provide a curriculum developed by/ with Wabanaki members that builds from K to 12. One that works towards weaving Wabanaki studies into other areas of the curriculum without repeating but builds on the previously presented material.

Funding for field trips and guest instructors is also necessary to complete a solid Wabanaki Studies program.

Thank you for listening.