



**Testimony of Maine Public Health Association in Support of:
LD 1642: An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools**

Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
Cross Building, Room 208
Tuesday, January 9, 2024

Dear Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Rebecca Boulos. I am a resident of South Portland and executive director of Maine Public Health Association. MPHA is in support of LD 1642: “An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools.”

MPHA is the state’s oldest, largest, and most diverse association for public health professionals. We represent more than 700 individual members and 60 organizations across the state. MPHA works to optimize the health of people and places in Maine through advocacy, education, partnerships, and public health workforce development. We are not tied to a national agenda, which means we are responsive to the needs of Maine’s communities, and we take that responsibility seriously.

According to the American Public Health Association’s [Tribal Public and Environmental Health Think Tank 2018 report](#): “...the unique history of forced relocation, intolerance of cultural norms and practices, and discriminatory state and federal policies enacted over several generations has resulted in historical trauma, adverse childhood experiences, distrust, and societal alienation. Additionally, American educational systems generally exclude an accurate account of American Indian/Alaska Native history ... Public health practitioners and policymakers are often unaware of important concepts, such as federal Indian law, trust responsibility, sovereignty, self-determination, consultation requirements, and research abuses. Furthermore, many data challenges limit the quality of information available about the American Indian/Alaska Native population, resulting in under-reporting and misrepresentation of the public health conditions affecting these populations.”¹

Everyone should have access to accurate information about history and culture – both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Providing Wabanaki education in Maine’s primary schools, guided by the reinstated Wabanaki Studies Commission, creates the foundation from which to build and sustain more respectful relationships between tribal and non-tribal communities and better enables us to address the systemic and policy barriers to health and wellbeing in tribal communities, outlined above.

As a public health entity, whose mission advances health equity, we support efforts to heal from generational trauma, promote health and wellbeing, and form and sustain respectful relationships between tribal and non-tribal communities. We see this legislation as one of those paths forward.

We are very supportive of this legislation and encourage you to please vote “Ought to Pass.” Thank you for your consideration.

¹Tribal Public and Environmental Health Think Tank. [Priorities in Tribal Public and Environmental Health](#). American Public Health Association. 2018.