

TO: Representative OSHER- presenter, Cosponsor Senator ROTUNDO, Representatives Brennan, Dana, Faulkingham, Millet, and Speaker Talbot Ross, and Senators Bennett, Jackson, and Rafferty, and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

RE: Support for LD 1642: *An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools*

FROM: Beth E. Clifford

My name is Beth Clifford, and I live in Perry. I'm a graduate of what was Oxford Hills High School, the University of Maine at Orono, and two graduate degrees at the University of Southern Maine, and I have taught and worked in Maine schools for the past 35+ years. Despite all of this, I knew next to nothing about the history, culture, and contributions of the Indigenous Peoples who have lived in what is now called Maine since time immemorial when I started my position as curriculum coordinator for Maine Indian Education in 2005.

By then, the Wabanaki Studies Law, LD 291, *An Act to Require Teaching of Maine Native American History and Culture in Maine's Schools* had already been in law for four years. Despite this, I don't remember any professional development opportunities to learn about the Wabanaki or any offers of support for educators to meet the responsibilities of this law.

I would like to think that my experiences are unique and that those who have entered the profession in the last decade or so are much more knowledgeable about the Wabanaki tribes, their homelands, cultures, and so much more. Unfortunately, the refrain I hear from educators across Maine speaks to the lack of resources to teach about the Wabanaki as well as feelings of being unprepared to do so, given their existing levels of knowledge and understanding.

I consider myself incredibly fortunate to be living in the homeland of the Passamaquoddy and for having the opportunity to work with members of the Passamaquoddy Tribe and Penobscot Nation. My colleagues and members of the communities have been wonderful teachers. The vast majority of educators across Maine do not have this same opportunity to learn about and from the Wabanaki.

Because of current circumstances, it is imperative for the State Legislature to pass LD 1642, *An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools* as amended. This will ensure the reestablishment of the Wabanaki Studies Commission, which will provide guidance for the Department of Education, administrators, and teachers with respect to resources, professional development, and support for implementing units of study in classrooms.

We all share the responsibility of providing current and future generations of Maine people with the knowledge and understanding of the rich culture and history of the Wabanaki. The truthful history and experiences of Wabanaki peoples and their countless contributions must become part of our school curricula. LD 291 was a visionary law when passed in 2001. We must do it justice by ensuring that LD 1642 becomes law.