

**Testimony by Wayne Cobb, Friends Committee on Maine Public Policy before the Education & Cultural Affairs Committee, 131st Maine Legislature on LD 1642, “An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools,” as amended.**

To Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and Esteemed Members of the Committee:

I am Wayne Cobb. I reside in Portland and I speak today on behalf of the Friends (Quaker) Committee on Maine Public Policy, specifically our Tribal-State Relations Committee. I speak to express our strong support for LD 1642, “An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools”, as amended.

Quakers in Maine have had a long-standing interest in the teaching of Wabanaki studies. We have been involved in trying to fill the gaps in curriculum about the Wabanaki by supporting curricula written or co-written by Wabanaki peoples (for example, *The Wabanakis of Maine and the Maritimes*, funded by the American Friends Service Committee for grades 4-8) But we have long been aware of the need for a comprehensive approach to teaching Wabanaki studies, grades K through 12.

LD 291, signed into law on June 15, 2001, requires schools to teach Maine K–12 students about Wabanaki territories, economic systems, cultural systems, governments, and political systems, as well as the Wabanaki Tribes’ relationships with local, state, national, and international governments. This Wabanaki Studies Law is critical to overcoming stereotypes and ignorance about Indigenous peoples, which are harmful to Wabanaki students and non-Native students alike.

However, a 2022 study by the Wabanaki Alliance, The Maine Indian Tribal-State Commission, the Abbe Museum and the ACLU of Maine found that the Wabanaki Studies Law was not being meaningfully enforced across the state. Since 2001, Maine students have graduated with little or no education about the Wabanaki Nations, and Wabanaki students continue to be erased from their own home’s history. The Department of Education, State Legislature, and individual school districts have an obligation to effectively implement the 2001 law, but educators and administrators do not have adequate support and resources to do so.

If passed, LD 1642 as amended would reinstate the Wabanaki Studies Commission, as required by the Wabanaki Studies Law of 2001. The Commission should be funded and given meaningful authority in implementing the law. With adequate support, it can guide oversight, make recommendations about curriculum and resources, and help shape necessary teacher training. It can and should oversee the development of a sample curriculum that can be replicated across the state, for school administrative units that do not create their own comprehensive curriculum development in this area.

Only when we provide all Maine students with an accurate education about our inherited past and imperfect present can we have meaningful and informed conversations about our shared future. The Friends Committee strongly recommends passage of LD1642 as amended.

Wayne Cobb  
Friends Committee on Maine Public Policy  
LD 1642

Testimony by Wayne Cobb, Friends Committee on Maine Public Policy before the Education & Cultural Affairs Committee, 131st Maine Legislature on LD 1642, “An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools,” as amended.

To Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and Esteemed Members of the Committee:

I am Wayne Cobb. I reside in Portland and I speak today on behalf of the Friends (Quaker) Committee on Maine Public Policy, specifically our Tribal-State Relations Committee. I speak to express our strong support for LD 1642, “An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools”, as amended.

Quakers in Maine have had a long-standing interest in the teaching of Wabanaki studies. We have been involved in trying to fill the gaps in curriculum about the Wabanaki by supporting curricula written or co-written by Wabanaki peoples (for example, The Wabanakis of Maine and the Maritimes, funded by the American Friends Service Committee for grades 4-8) But we have long been aware of the need for a comprehensive approach to teaching Wabanaki studies, grades K through 12.

LD 291, signed into law on June 15, 2001, requires schools to teach Maine K–12 students about Wabanaki territories, economic systems, cultural systems, governments, and political systems, as well as the Wabanaki Tribes’ relationships with local, state, national, and international governments. This Wabanaki Studies Law is critical to overcoming stereotypes and ignorance about Indigenous peoples, which are harmful to Wabanaki students and non-Native students alike.

However, a 2022 study by the Wabanaki Alliance, The Maine Indian Tribal-State Commission, the Abbe Museum and the ACLU of Maine found that the Wabanaki Studies Law was not being meaningfully enforced across the state. Since 2001, Maine students have graduated with little or no education about the Wabanaki Nations, and Wabanaki students continue to be erased from their own home’s history. The Department of Education, State Legislature, and individual school districts have an obligation to effectively implement the 2001 law, but educators and administrators do not have adequate support and resources to do so.

If passed, LD 1642 as amended would reinstate the Wabanaki Studies Commission, as required by the Wabanaki Studies Law of 2001. The Commission should be funded and given meaningful authority in implementing the law. With adequate support, it can guide oversight, make recommendations about curriculum and resources, and help shape necessary teacher training. It can and should oversee the development of a sample curriculum that can be replicated across the state, for school administrative units that do not create their own comprehensive curriculum development in this area.

Only when we provide all Maine students with an accurate education about our inherited past and imperfect present can we have meaningful and informed conversations about our shared future. The Friends Committee strongly recommends passage of LD1642 as amended.