



January 09, 2024

Joint Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs  
111 Sewall St.  
Augusta, ME 04330

*Submitted electronically*

***Subject: FoodCorps Testimony in Support of LD 1642 - An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools***

Hon. Chair and Members of the Joint Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 1642, a bill that would establish the Wabanaki Studies Commission to ensure the inclusion of Wabanaki studies in education curricula as required by the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 20-A, section 4706, subsection 4.

My name is Malia Demers, and I'm the Maine Program Coordinator with FoodCorps, submitting this letter along with my colleague Ryan Parker, Maine Impact & Partnerships Lead. As a part of [FoodCorps](https://www.foodcorps.org), we have witnessed the positive impact of connecting students to healthy food and diverse cultures through hands-on learning. FoodCorps is a national non-profit that partners with schools and communities to nourish kids' health, education, and sense of belonging. In Maine, FoodCorps currently serves in 8 school districts across the state, providing nutrition education, school garden support, and local food procurement. FoodCorps also supports and collaborates with the Maine School Garden Network, the Maine Farm and Sea to School Network (MFSN) and the MSFN Institute. Among recent feedback surveys we sent to farm to school practitioners, Wabanaki Studies was a highly requested training topic, indicating that educators have a strong desire to teach Wabanaki studies, especially as it relates to food. However, this also highlights the lack of coordinated, culturally appropriate resources and training that exist for public educators on the topic. So much of what we know about growing food has roots in indigenous knowledge. For example, tapping maple trees, harvesting fiddleheads sustainably, and interplanting corn, beans and squash. When students can experience this type of hands-on subject matter in a way that centers ideas of reciprocity and gratitude, students are likely to be engaged and better prepared to be conscious citizens, and indigenous students are more connected to material when they feel accurately represented.

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Maine LD 1642, introduced by Representative Laurie Osher, would create a commission composed of representatives from the Wabanaki tribes, the Department of Education, and other stakeholders to assist school districts and educators in implementing Wabanaki studies in their curricula. The commission would also provide guidance, resources, and training to ensure that Wabanaki studies are taught in a culturally appropriate and accurate manner.

This bill would build on the landmark Wabanaki Studies Law enacted in 2001, which mandated the inclusion of Wabanaki studies in Maine studies. However, as a recent report by the ACLU of Maine, the Wabanaki Alliance, and the Abbe Museum revealed, many Maine schools have failed to comply with this law, leaving a gap in the education of Maine students and the recognition of Wabanaki peoples. Maine LD 1642 would address this gap by providing the necessary oversight, support, and accountability to ensure the successful implementation of Wabanaki studies across the state.

As a supporter of Wabanaki studies, we urge you to vote in favor of LD 1642 and to encourage your colleagues to do the same. This bill would not only benefit the Wabanaki tribes and their students' sense of belonging, but also enrich the education and civic engagement of all Maine students and citizens.

Thank you for your consideration and your service to our state.

Respectfully Submitted,

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