



Testimony before the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee

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

January 11, 2024

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and Members of the Committee:

I am Rev. Jane Field, Executive Director of the Maine Council of Churches. The Council has seven mainline Protestant member-denominations and two associate member congregations who represent more than 400 local churches in Maine with over 50,000 parishioners in their care. I am testifying on behalf of the Council **in SUPPORT of LD 1642.**

In the sacred texts in which our seven traditions are rooted, Hebrew and Christian scripture, two of the central values are truth-telling and solidarity with the marginalized and oppressed. LD 1642 would help Maine make progress toward both.

When Maine's students and teachers have a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the history and contributions of the Wabanaki nations, we will be better able to build an accepting, more cohesive, and inclusive community for tomorrow. Telling the truth, both about the long history of oppression and the long history of resilience and resistance of the Wabanaki tribes is an essential element in a rigorous education program that engenders cultural awareness and respect.

The report released by the Abbe Museum, ACLU of Maine, the Maine Indian Tribal-State Commission, and the Wabanaki Alliance on Indigenous Peoples' Day in 2022 found that many Maine schools have failed to include Wabanaki Studies consistently and appropriately in their curriculum and that the Wabanaki Studies Law is not being meaningfully enforced. Neglecting to incorporate Wabanaki studies sends a clear message of disrespect for a group of people who have lived and worked in Maine for thousands of years, stewarded this land and its natural resources, voted as citizens, fought in consequential American wars, and significantly contributed to Maine's culture.

We at MCC have been troubled by attempts to erase Indigenous people's history from schools and classrooms. We affirm the need for Maine's students and teachers to learn the history of *all* people who live here. To do otherwise threatens to reverse our country's progress toward creating a more perfect union, as our founders called for in the Constitution.

We urge you to ensure that Wabanaki voices and stories are not erased from statewide and local school curricula by voting OUGHT TO PASS on LD 1642.

Jane Field  
Maine Council of Churches  
LD 1642

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