

John Maddaus
Committee on Indian Relations of the Episcopal Diocese of Maine
LD 1642

Testimony of the Committee on Indian Relations of the Episcopal Diocese of Maine
In Support of LD 1642 An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in
Maine Schools, as amended,
Sponsored by Rep. Laurie Osher

Sen. Rafferty, Rep. Brennan, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on
Education and Cultural Affairs; my name is John Maddaus, and I am chair of the
Legislative Committee of the Committee on Indian Relations of the Episcopal
Diocese of Maine. On behalf of the Committee on Indian Relations, I ask you to vote
Ought to Pass on LD 1642.

The Episcopal Committee on Indian Relations was formed by resolution of the
Diocesan Convention in 1991. For 32 years, we have lived into our mission “to
deepen our relationship with the Wabanaki of Maine, to stand with the tribes in the
pursuit of justice, to affirm their inherent sovereignty, and to support the preservation
of Native languages and culture.”

The date of the creation of the Committee on Indian Relations is no accident. Our
committee was formed in anticipation of the national celebration of the 500th
anniversary of the arrival of Christopher Columbus on the shores of Caribbean Islands
in his failed attempt to reach the spices and other wealth of India and the rest of Asia.
The lands that we now know as the Americas were already occupied by Indigenous
peoples who Columbus mistakenly referred to as Indians. Ignoring the fact that a
person cannot “discover” lands already known to millions of inhabitants, Columbus’
ruthless attack on and brutal conquest of the Indigenous peoples he encountered was
long celebrated as the “discovery” of America. We were aware, in 1991, that our
Wabanaki neighbors had a very different understanding of our shared history, both
within Maine and throughout the Americas. Thankfully, in 2019, the Legislature
recognized that injustice had been done, and changed the name of Columbus Day to
Indigenous Peoples Day.

For 32 years, our Committee has sought to inform the people of the Episcopal
Diocese of Maine about our Wabanaki neighbors. One measure of our progress is that
several annual Diocesan Conventions, the policy making body of the Diocese, have
passed resolutions recognizing and supporting the sovereignty of the Wabanaki
nations.

LD 1642 would continue the work begun by Chapter 403 of the Maine Public Laws of
2001, also known as LD 291, in educating children in all Maine schools about the
history of Indigenous-settler relations in Maine. The Committee on Indian Relations
views this work in Maine schools as complementary to the work we do in our
Diocese. We celebrate all those Maine educators who have sought to educate
themselves and their students regarding Wabanaki history and culture. We thank the
Wabanaki Alliance, the Maine Indian Tribal-State Commission, the ACLU of Maine,
and the Abbe Museum for their 2022 report on where we stand as a state in
implementing Wabanaki Studies, and on what remains to be done. We are aware of
the limitations of the work so far carried out in Maine schools, and we believe that
reconstituting the Wabanaki Studies Commission, with expanded membership and
responsibilities, is essential to carrying on the educational work that remains to be
done. We believe that LD 1642 includes the next steps which our state and its schools
need to take in order that we, who are the descendants of European settlers, may all
engage in respectful and just relationships with our Wabanaki neighbors.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony. Please vote Ought to Pass on LD
1642.