

January 9, 2024

Senator Joseph Rafferty, Chair
Representative Michael Brennan, Chair
Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
100 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

Re: Testimony on LD 1642, “An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools”

Good afternoon, Chair Rafferty and Chair Brennan, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Judy Netherland, I live in Hollis Center.

I am present to speak in support of LD 1642 today as I have a deep educational background and passion for the topic at hand. I have both a bachelor’s and master’s degree in history, and my master’s thesis was, in fact, on Donna Loring’s 2001 legislation, LD 291, a Law to Teach About Maine’s Native Americans, and the importance of implementing this law in Maine schools. When I started my bachelor’s degree, I was rightfully upset about the amount of history that was not taught to me in grade school. As I considered topics for my master’s thesis, I examined this interest and passion regarding the importance of teaching Maine’s children the real history of our state, which is how I came upon Loring’s bill. I became determined to dig in on this topic of critical importance, and I quickly realized what a benefit this would be if the state of Maine could both implement this bill and hold schools accountable for accurately teaching Native American history and culture.

Why is it important to teach Indigenous history and culture to Maine’s students? The first answer that comes to mind is that they deserve it. Also, teaching children about Indigenous cultures helps them to be relativistic about other cultures and to connect with students who come from cultures other than their own. Being taught Indigenous history and culture will help students to consciously break down systemic ideas of racism and intolerance. We build better adults by teaching Maine’s students about Native American history and culture.

Because of Chair Rafferty and Chair Brennan, and all the others who introduced and sponsored the legislation you are considering today, Maine sits on the precipice of being a leader on this topic. Currently, only a handful of states have created laws to mandate teaching K through 12 students Native American history and culture. To my knowledge, no state has fully implemented these laws. I am

proud of this state's leadership. I would be prouder still to know that Maine law makers of all backgrounds saw the benefit of LD 1642 and voted this into law, becoming an example to other states to follow in their footsteps. I thank you all for your valuable time, and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have regarding my research. I respectfully ask you to vote to pass LD 1642.

Sincerely,

Judy Netherland

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