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Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

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

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, my name is Kaitlyn Nuzzo and I am the Government Relations Director for The Nature Conservancy in Maine. **I appreciate this opportunity to submit comments in support of LD 1642 - An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools.**

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Guided by science, we create innovative, on-the-ground solutions to our world's toughest challenges so that nature and people can thrive together. We use a collaborative approach that engages local communities, governments, the private sector, and other partners. TNC has been leading conservation in Maine for more than 60 years and is the 12th largest landowner in the state, owning and managing roughly 300,000 acres.

As an organization committed to creating a future of healthy lands, waters, and communities, we believe that one of the most effective and enduring actions we can take is to strengthen Indigenous Peoples' voices, choices, and actions. This is a major focus of TNC's work in Maine and around the world. Here in Maine, we continue to learn about the historical and ongoing injustices faced by Wabanaki children, families, and communities, and we acknowledge the urgency of addressing them.

LD 1642 would reestablish the Wabanaki Studies Commission and support consistent implementation of a law passed in 2001 mandating that Maine public schools teach students about the Wabanaki. It would also increase the amount of support available for schools and teachers by directing the Department of Education to establish and fund teacher education programs in Wabanaki studies.

Creating opportunities to understand the full history and range of impacts - especially the burdens those impacts impose on communities that have historically and continue to experience oppression and marginalization - will help current and future generations of students. LD 1642 is a critical step toward improving student outcomes and implementing current law. We urge this committee to support LD 1642. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.