



Maine Council for English Language Arts
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January 8, 2024

Subject: LD 2001 - An Act to Establish the African American Studies Advisory Council and Require Funding for African American Studies.

Dear Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

I am writing to you as the President of the Maine Council for English Language Arts (MCELA), an affiliate of the National Council of Teachers of English, to express our organization's wholehearted support for LD 2001 - An Act to Establish the African American Studies Advisory Council and Require Funding for African American Studies. We believe that this proposed legislation represents a significant step towards enhancing the educational landscape in Maine, fostering inclusivity, and promoting a more accurate representation of African American voices and history.

The establishment of the African American Studies Advisory Council, as outlined in LD 2001, is a commendable initiative. By creating a resource to provide educational online and on-site programming related to the State's African American history, the advisory council will play a crucial role in supporting educators, school administrative units, and the public. MCELA recognizes the importance of collaboration between various groups, and we particularly appreciate the inclusion of an advisory council that involves various stakeholders and relevant organizations.

We believe that networking with other groups is vital for the success of this initiative, so we also suggest creating an advisory council that includes representatives from the Maine Association of School Librarians, Maine Humanities Council, Maine Writers and Publishers Alliance, Maine Arts Commission, Maine Council for English Language Arts, Maine Association of Middle Level Education, and the Maine Council for Social Studies. This collaborative approach will ensure a more comprehensive and effective support system for teachers and students.

MCELA also advocates for the inclusion of funding for a revised edition of *Maine Speaks*, with updates reflecting the proposed bills and providing valuable resources for teachers. This edition could serve as a comprehensive guide for educators, incorporating African American studies and other relevant topics.

To enhance teacher engagement, we propose the establishment of a tiered system of involvement and opportunities. This could include book clubs, professional development credentials, and institutes, providing educators with various avenues to deepen their understanding of African American studies. We draw inspiration from successful initiatives like Dawnland - Maine Indian History and suggest a similar microcredential system for African American studies, allowing teachers to pursue additional qualifications and expertise.

Additionally, it is crucial to extend funding not only to school districts but also to individual teachers. By providing financial support for educators to pursue African American studies independently, outside of their regular studies, we empower them to bring enriched perspectives into their classrooms.

In conclusion, MCELA fully supports LD 2001 and encourages the Committee to advance this legislation. We believe that investing in African American studies will contribute significantly to creating a more inclusive and accurate educational environment in Maine.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We are available for any further discussions or clarification that may be required.

Sincerely,

Patti Forster, President
Maine Council for English Language Arts (MCELA)