

Larissa Malone  
Field of Education  
LD 2001

My name is Larissa Malone and I am a former associate professor and chair of teacher education at the University of Southern Maine. I am testifying in favor of LD 2001, An Act to Establish the African American Studies Advisory Council and Require Funding for African American Studies.

At a time when other states are codifying laws to suppress the great history of African-Americans in this country, Maine has been rightly highlighted in national news outlets for moving the needle in the right direction with the passage of LD 1664 in 2021, An Act to integrate African American Studies and the History of Genocide into the Statewide System of Learning Results. Sadly, though, majority of the school districts in the state of Maine have not done so yet. I support LD 2001 because it provides additional means to teach all children the complete history of this state, which includes the contributions, legacy, and narratives of African-Americans that have been in Maine for over 400 years. LD 2001 is a necessary step to ensure that LD 1664 is more than just equity window dressing for the state of Maine. The passage of LD 2001 will provide continuing educational resources for current educators, strengthen African-American history advocacy within the Maine Department of Education, and provide a way to understand progress on teaching African-American history across the state.

I have been an educator for over 25 years and a teacher educator for over a decade. When students first enter teacher certification programs, I intentionally include nuggets of African-American history, although I don't teach a curriculum methods course. Their question is often, "why didn't I learn this history when I was in K-12 school?" By the end of the program, their question shifts to, "why am I not fully prepared to teach African-American history to my future students?" We must break this cycle of inadequate teacher education preparation. It is my hope that LD 2001 influences positive change in teacher education programming in order to counter the social reproduction of anti-Blackness that exist in this country, of which Maine is no exception.

The inclusion of African-American history benefits all children. It teaches students to have a greater appreciation for the contributions, struggles, and lived experiences of African-Americans and helps cultivate a community that is inclusive and accepting of others. It sends the clear message that everyone is worthy of human dignity and all lives have meaning and purpose. Moreover, for students of color, research shows that including African-American history has overwhelmingly positive effects. Can you imagine going through 13 years of school and not seeing yourself reflected in the curriculum? This is what I experienced. This is what my three daughters experienced too. I support LD 2001 so that my future grandchildren will hopefully have a different experience.

It is the state of Maine's duty to necessitate teaching African-American history in all Maine schools. In less than a week we will celebrate the life and legacy of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and I end my testimony with his powerful words today. "It seems to me that education has a two-fold function to perform in the life of man and in society: the one is utility and the other is culture" (King, 1947). LD 2001 is important because it effectively addresses both of these purposes and I strongly urge the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee to support the passage of this bill.