



DATE: Jan. 11, 2024
TO: Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs
FROM: Samantha Warren, UMS Director of Government & Community Relations
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RE: **LD 2001, An Act to Establish the African American Studies Advisory Council and Require Funding for African American Studies**

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs: My name is Samantha Warren and I am the Director of Government Relations for the University of Maine System (UMS) and a proud alumna of the University of Maine at Farmington and the University of Maine. I am writing on behalf of UMS to inform your consideration of LD 2001, *An Act to Establish the African American Studies Advisory Council and Require Funding for African American Studies*. I know you will also hear from other members of our university community who have lived experience and who have directly worked to support African American studies being taught in Maine and believe more resources for schools are needed.

We applaud Speaker Talbot Ross and LD 2001's co-sponsors for being inclusive of educator preparation programs in policy and investment proposals intended to positively impact PK-12 teaching and learning. Maine's public universities are the state's largest producer of classroom-ready teachers, having awarded nearly 4,000 education degrees or certificates in the past five years. Among our six State-approved educator preparation programs are Maine's only to have achieved national accreditation (UMaine, UMF and University of Southern Maine). Seven of the past 10 Maine Teachers of the Year are proud UMS graduates including the 2024 Maine Teacher of the Year and USM alum, Joshua Chard, who recently noted, **"A robust and affordable public university system is at the heart of educational equity."**

As I shared with you recently during a hearing on a similar bill to elevate and expand Wabanaki Studies, our educator preparation programs take seriously their responsibility to be an ongoing resource to Maine schools. In response to needs identified by Black educators and a new law requiring integration of African American studies and the history of genocide in the Maine Learning Results, USM Associate Professor of Teacher Education Larissa Malone founded the Maine Black Educators Collective (MBEC) in 2021. While Dr. Malone has since accepted an appointment at UNC-Wilmington, the work of the collective to connect, support and empower Black educators through a professional learning community continues.

The path to teacher certification in Maine is well-defined and requires a very specific series of courses (detailed in State Board Rule Chapter 115) to which our State-approved educator preparation programs closely align. Currently, there is no teaching of African American studies and/or Maine African Studies requirement as part of this sequence, and no courses

or experiences specific to teaching these important topics are offered by our educator preparation programs. However, various courses across a span of content areas do incorporate teaching of this history and culture and elevate Black voices. For example, students in USM's EDU 222 (Foundations of Language and Literacy Development) utilize primary sources from the 19th century available through the Osher Map Library and read various texts from Black scholars. Meanwhile in EDU 404/504 (Secondary Social Studies Methods), students engage with USM's Special Collections to explore Maine Black history. Additionally, faculty in our history programs directly support Maine's PK-12 educators. For example, USM Associate Professor of African American History and Politics Leroy Rowe collaborates with teachers at Portland's Deering High School to support their African American History courses.

If LD 2001 becomes law, UMS is committed to having members of our university community contribute to the important work of the African American Studies Advisory Council. We look forward to the Council's recommendations informing the curricula of our educator preparation programs and the professional development they provide Maine educators and welcome State funding to support that work as the bill proposes.

Additionally, I would remind the Committee that our public universities' educator preparation programs also regularly host summer institutes and may be a resource to the Department in carrying-out that component of this bill. For example, a recent summer institute for teachers of grades 3-12 at USM's Osher Map Library focused on teaching with maps, with an emphasis on Maritime New England, and African American and Indigenous perspectives.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the University of Maine System. Please let me know if I can provide additional information to the Committee or LD 2001's stakeholders.