

Testimony from Tobin Williamson of the Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition regarding:
**LD 2001: An Act to Establish the African American Studies Advisory Council and Require
Funding for African American Studies**

Sponsored By: Speaker Rachel Talbot Ross of Portland

Dear Sen. Rafferty, Rep. Brennan, and Members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

My name is Tobin Williamson and I am the Manager of Advocacy & Policy with the Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition (MIRC), a network of around 100 member organizations working to enhance the lives of Maine's immigrant communities across the state. MIRC works to advance systemic changes in Maine through collaborative advocacy to ensure that voices and perspectives of the state's large, diverse, and growing immigrant communities are heard at the State House in Augusta, in the Halls of Congress in D.C., and in municipalities throughout Maine.

I am writing in support of LD 2001. There are a lot of things in this bill to like. For example, it establishes a permanent commission in the state's Department of Education to advise on African American Studies, as well as a full-time coordinator and a strategic planning task force. It will provide professional development opportunities for educators. As we aspire for our state to be more inclusive, this sort of intentionality is needed.

Additionally, from my organization's perspective, as so many new arrivals to Maine come from places like Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Sudan, and other places in Africa, this topic might be especially meaningful to them as they learn about their new country's history. Representation matters, including when it comes to learning about history and the full story of it.

To quote the bill sponsor's testimony on her legislation, LD 2001 "will take up this Legislature's commitment to the full and accurate telling of Maine's story in our education system and facilitate its robust and equitable fulfillment." We hope that you will vote ought to pass LD 2001. Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

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