

Sen. Rafferty, Rep. Brennan, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs; my name is Kaya Lolar. I am a Panawahpskek (Penobscot) citizen, Harvard College junior, John Bapst alum, and former student of RSU #34 (Kindergarten-Grade 8). Through my elementary and middle school years, I received very little teaching regarding Indigenous Studies, and the majority of what I did receive was incredibly generalized, focusing on Indigenous people as a “whole” or Indigenous tribes/nations that are not a part of the Wabanaki Confederacy, despite the fact that our school sits on land that was once occupied by Panawahpskek people and is less than a five-minute drive from the current Penobscot Nation Reservation. I struggled with my identity growing up, as many young children would (and do) when searching for representation in a space where it seldom exists. If not for the sake of all students learning openly and holistically of the first peoples of our land, Wabanaki Studies should at the very least be taught for the sake of the young Native students today struggling to feel welcomed or valued in a system that wipes their ancestors from our educational memory.

I remember making Native American-inspired “baskets” in an elementary classroom with paper, yarn, and a hole-punch. We Googled pictures of Wabanaki double curve designs and attempted to draw them on the sides of our baskets without any further education on the abundance of meaning each design holds. I knew this felt wrong, but I didn’t know how to question it. I didn’t know that I had the authority to. Sometimes, teachers would look to me when a question came up about the Wabanaki in class that they didn’t know the answer to, like I was born with some sort of expertise on every aspect of our culture and history. This frustrated me. It made my sense of identity feel even more unstable, but I don’t blame the teachers. It can be scary to teach about something you know very little about, especially when you know you could be teaching a child something about herself or her people that turns out to be wrong.

I’ve spent a great deal of time working and collaborating with educators over the past few years, as a substitute teacher, a member of the LD291 task force, and an instructional designer and advisor working on Wabanaki Studies educator materials and MOOSE modules, and the most overwhelming response I’ve heard from these educators when asked why Wabanaki Studies has not been thoroughly implemented in their schools since it was enacted into law in 2001 is a lack of resources and confidence. It is clear that further guidance, resources, and encouragement are necessary in order to ensure that Wabanaki Studies is taught in the way that LD291 originally required in 2001.

This is why it is crucial that we integrate Wabanaki Studies directly into our standards and, frankly, that we do not just stop there. The tendency to teach only about Indigenous people in an isolated unit perpetuates the idea that we are separate from today’s society—that we don’t exist in the same spaces as our peers whose history is woven cyclically through our social studies curriculum. Furthermore, why is Wabanaki Studies restricted only to social studies when, to put it in the terms of the education system, it is an intrinsically interdisciplinary subject (i.e. the Wabanaki people were, in fact, the first scientists of our land)? This is certainly *not* a call for Wabanaki Studies to flood all aspects of K12 curriculum in what is now called Maine. This would merely continue to be another component that is brought to the table for standards

revision and logically woven into standards only when it *makes sense*. This should not be something groundbreaking, and the long overdue implementation of Wabanaki Studies structurally into Maine's education should not be seen as something that takes away from other underrepresented groups. I urge the committee to vote ought to pass.

Woliwoni,  
Kaya Lolar