

Testimony of the Wabanaki Alliance in support of  
LD 1642 An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools  
Presented for the Public Hearing Before the Maine Legislature's Committee Education &  
Cultural Affairs  
January 9, 2024

Sen. Rafferty, Rep. Brennan, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs; my name is John Dieffenbacher-Krall. I reside in Old Town, and I am the Executive Director of the [Wabanaki Alliance](#). The group was founded in June 2020 by the four Wabanaki Nations principally living in five communities in what we today call the State of Maine, the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, Mi'kmaq Nation, Passamaquoddy Tribe at Motahkomikuk, Passamaquoddy Tribe at Sipayik, and Penobscot Nation. The Wabanaki Alliance was created to educate the people of Maine about the need for securing the inherent sovereignty of Wabanaki Nations.

The Wabanaki Alliance supports LD 1642. We thank Rep. Osher for introducing this bill.

Maine Public Law 2001, Chapter 403 (LD 291) An Act to Require Teaching of Maine Native American History and Culture in Maine's Schools is an existing Maine law poorly implemented as documented by numerous organizations and individuals, perhaps most notably in the report, [The Wabanaki Studies Law: 21 Years After Implementation](#), released on Indigenous Peoples' Day in 2022. The idea for this law emerged from a summit between Wabanaki leaders and then Governor Angus King. They believed Wabanaki-Maine relations could be greatly improved if Maine students had a greater knowledge of Wabanaki Nations.

The *Wabanaki Studies Law* report found:

- The Wabanaki Studies Law is not meaningfully enforced across the state.
- School districts have failed to consistently and appropriately include Wabanaki Studies in their curriculum.
- Teacher training and professional development remain insufficient to equip educators to teach Wabanaki Studies.

The report's coauthors recommended:

- Reinstate the Wabanaki Studies Commission.
- The Department of Education should update the Maine Learning Results with specific learning outcomes for Wabanaki Studies.
- School districts must be held accountable through a review of comprehensive education plans.
- Community members should be involved in holding their school districts accountable.
- The Department of Education should work with the newly constituted Wabanaki Studies Commission to create a model curriculum.
- The Department of Education and school administrative districts must support educators with access to materials to teach Wabanaki Studies.

- Wabanaki Studies must be required as part of teacher certification and continuing teacher education.

LD 1642 is a thoughtful response to the deficient implementation of Wabanaki Studies in the State of Maine. It would reestablish the Wabanaki Studies Commission as suggested by the 2022 report. The Commission proposed under LD 1642 has four additional seats as compared to the prior Wabanaki Studies Commission recognizing each Passamaquoddy community as separate tribal governments, adding a seat appointed by the Commissioner of Education, and granting an appointment to the Maine Indian Tribal-State Commission.

The bill also updates the term for this body of knowledge from Maine Native American Studies to Wabanaki Studies to more accurately describe the course of study. Wabanaki Studies must be included in the review of content standards and performance indicators of the learning results. The Department of Education utilizing a representative sample of schools must periodically study the Wabanaki Studies curricula developed by Maine schools every five years. The bill also directs the department to publish its findings. To address the need to support teachers to equip them with the proficiency to teach Wabanaki Studies with confidence, the bill requires the department to establish teacher institutes in Wabanaki Studies.

The poor implementation of this law has resulted in depriving an entire generation of Maine students with the knowledge they need to relate with their Wabanaki neighbors and more generally with the estimated 370 million Indigenous People in the world. The original need for this law remains as relevant to Maine today, to provide Maine students with a more accurate, comprehensive, and in-depth understanding of the Wabanaki Nations. I urge the committee to vote ought to pass in favor of this bill.