

Testimony of the Wabanaki Alliance in support of  
LD 2001 An Act to Establish the African American Studies Advisory Council and Require  
Funding for African American Studies

Presented for the Public Hearing Before the Maine Legislature's Committee on Education &  
Cultural Affairs  
January 11, 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 2001. We thank Speaker Talbot Ross for introducing this bill.

The effective teaching of history is incredibly important to any society. A healthy democracy that recognizes every individual and distinct population group requires the teaching of a complete history, not one solely focused on one racial group or gender. We know history as an academic discipline and body of knowledge has often failed to include the full breadth of humanity ignoring or minimizing the contributions and significance of marginalized groups. Indigenous Peoples have certainly experienced such marginalization. And so have people of African origin and their descendants.

LD 2001 would help ensure we teach a more complete, accurate, and truthful history concerning all the human beings who have lived in this place and what they have contributed to Maine society. Teaching Maine students about the history of Black people in Maine, what they have experienced, and how they have helped shape the society we have today is critical so students have a fuller understanding of how Maine came to be the society it is today.

In an ideal world, we might not need to advance bills such as LD 1642 An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools and LD 2001. We do not live in an ideal place. We live in one in which this committee heard two days ago Wabanaki citizens recounting how during their public-school experience they heard classmates state Indians no longer exist or "I thought we exterminated all of them." We saw a rise of bold expressions of hate, racism, and white supremacy in this state last year directed against many peoples based on their race, religion, gender identity, and sexual orientation. We need to strengthen the teaching of history to ensure Maine students have a broad understanding of it enabling them to relate to a world in which individuals and peoples formerly actively oppressed are more visible and rightfully claiming the same rights enjoyed by more privileged groups among us. A more robust, complete history curriculum in Maine schools will also enable Maine students to recognize differences of political status, race, ethnicity, gender and many other categories as something to acknowledge that enriches and strengthens us, not something to fear, ridicule, or attack.

I urge the committee to vote ought to pass in favor of this bill.