



TO: The Honorable Joseph Rafferty
The Honorable Michael Brennan, Co-Chairs
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

DATE: January 9th, 2023

RE: LD 1642, An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools

Good afternoon Senator Rafferty and Representative Brennan.

The League of Women Voters of Maine supports LD 1642, An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools.

The League of Women Voters of Maine is a nonpartisan political organization that has been working for over 100 years to encourage informed and active participation in government, to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and to influence public policy through education and advocacy. We never support or oppose any political party or candidate.

As a member of the Wabanaki Alliance's Legislation Coalition, the League of Women Voters of Maine supports efforts to improve the standing of Wabanaki tribal nations in what is today Maine. We believe that education about the culture and history of different groups of people fosters deeper understanding and respect between groups. This is true for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in Maine, who would both benefit from learning about Wabanaki nations.

The Maine State Legislature recognized the importance of this type of education when it passed the visionary 2001 law requiring that public schools in Maine teach students about the Wabanaki. Unfortunately, this law has not been effectively implemented, which is why LD 1642 is needed. LD 1642 would take steps to remedy the lack of implementation, including re-establishing the Wabanaki Studies Commission. The commission could offer guidance to support a full implementation of the 2001 law.

Laws such as the 2001 Wabanaki studies requirement are only effective insofar as there are resources to implement them. It is unrealistic to expect overburdened school districts and educators themselves to have the capacity to implement Wabanaki studies in their classrooms without institutional support. LD 1642 would take steps to provide such support, so that all students can receive this critical education about the place we call home and the people of it.

Thank you for considering our testimony. We urge the committee to vote in favor of LD 1642.