

Testimony of Mary Griffith on LD 291: An act to Require Teaching of Maine Native American History and Culture in Maine Schools.

Good afternoon Senator Mitchell, Representative Richard, and members of the committee.

I am Mary Griffith. From 1978 through 1989 I was the program director for the Wabanaki Program of the American Friends Service Committee. This program worked to increase understanding and diminish tensions between Native and non-Native people in Maine. Currently I am a seventh-grade science teacher at Philip W. Sugg Middle School in Lisbon Falls.

During the last four or five years that I was staffperson with the Wabanaki Program, I was the coordinator and one of the writers for a project that produced The Wabanakis of Maine and the Maritimes, a 500-page curriculum guide for educators teaching about Wabanaki people at all educational levels. The book was written in response to Maine educators' requests for materials that they could use in classrooms to teach about Maine Indian history and culture.

I worked closely with a committee of Wabanaki people from Maine and the Maritimes, members of four tribes or nations who decided what to include in the book and how it should be presented. Numerous historians, anthropologists, and archaeologists worked with us as well, reviewing the text and providing scholarly perspectives on a variety of topics. In addition, more than a hundred Maine educators were involved, telling us what they needed in the classroom, field-testing our materials, and helping to critique the book.

For the many volunteers involved in the project, this was a labor of love. We worked to present well-balanced information and perspectives, believing that our work would result in increased understanding and fewer feelings of mistrust between Native and Non-Native communities. We included a historical perspective on the thousands of years that Native people lived in Maine before Europeans arrived, and continued the story right up to present day, which few history books do. When writing about periods of conflict we were careful to treat all sides with respect and to try to consider all participants' motivations and viewpoints.

I was struck by the respect people who were involved in this project had for each other. Members of the Native writing committee came from different communities, different nations, and different backgrounds, and they had differing viewpoints on many issues. When consensus was not possible, the committee included information reflecting variety of perspectives. Similarly, the viewpoints of scholars and teachers were respectfully incorporated into the book. During these years relationships formed and strengthened among members of different Native communities, as well as among teachers and scholars and Native people.

I believe that including information about Wabanaki people in school curriculum in primary and secondary schools and in the Learning Results can also result in building respect among people from different communities and backgrounds. I believe that it is only fair that history is presented in a more accurate fashion and not from the point of view of just the dominant culture. But I also believe that this is the best way to teach history and social studies. Students get much more out of their studies if they can look at differing perspectives --for example, English, French and Wabanaki points of view during colonial times. It is also important for them to realize that there were different perspectives and motivations within each community. Considering these perspectives in depth will not only make history more interesting, but will also give students more insight into contemporary issues and prepare them to be more informed participants themselves.

I hope you will vote "ought to pass" for this bill. This is a unique opportunity to deepen our Maine curriculum in a meaningful way that may lead to increasing respect and understanding among Maine communities.

I am privileged to be one of the advisors of the newly formed Civil Rights Team at Philip W.Sugg Middle School. When students on the team heard that I was going to testify on this bill, some of them wanted to join me. They are here to read their testimony after spending the morning as pages.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Testimony of Philip W. Sugg Middle School Students on LD 291: An Act to Require Teaching of Maine Native American History and Culture in Maine Schools.

Good afternoon Senator Mitchell, Representative Richard, and members of the committee.

I am Kristen Ruby. I believe that students should learn a lot more about Maine Native Americans in school. They are an important part of Maine's history and should be recognized for their part in our history. They have played a big part in the development of Maine, but are not recognized for it. A lot of people don't really understand them and that a lot of the myths they hear aren't true. I don't think that it's fair to discriminate against Maine Native Americans. Many students that don't understand about Native Americans make fun of them and the way they talk, act and live because it is different that the ways they talk, act and live. I believe that these ways people act about Native Americans need to be changed forever.

Good afternoon Senator Mitchell, Representative Richard, and members of the committee.

I am Sabrina Bucher. I think that it would be a very good idea to have it be required to teach about Native Americans. A lot of people misunderstand them and think that they are all bad! They believe the stories and myths that they hear from people who don't know what they are talking about. People are very quick to judge things when they first see something that is different. The prejudice in our society can really hurt people's feelings.

Maine Native Americans are a very important part of Maine's history and they are very misunderstood. Most people think of Native Americans as stupid people who didn't know how to build houses and buildings and stuff. The truth is that if we were more like Native Americans, then our planet would be a lot healthier, with less extinction and pollution. I think that this is a very important law and it should be passed so at least people will understand about them.

Good afternoon Senator Mitchell, Representative Richard, and members of the committee.

My name is Kristen Ackley. I think it would be a great idea for students in the Maine school systems to learn about the Wabanakis of Maine. If students learn about them today, there will be a better tomorrow. I think most people will benefit from such a course. I think that there are probably a lot of students in school systems that are wondering about the Native American Culture of Maine.

Good afternoon Senator Mitchell, Representative Richard, and members of the committee.

My name is Abby Wright. I think the bill should be passed. I think is young adults are educated about the culture and history of Native people it would limit discrimination, bias, and misconceptions. In the past young people have been taught only what textbook pages say. This creates misconceptions and what children are taught are what they learn.

If a sort of ignorance is taught the only thing you know is that sort of ignorance.

Good afternoon Senator Mitchell, Representative Richard, and members of the committee.

My name is Megan Virginia Fillmore. On Wednesday I went to the library and did research on the history of Native people, and I felt in just one chapter I had the message that Native people were nothing more than murderers. When I'm 30 I know I don't want my child to come home telling me that Native Americans are only savages. Then I'd be ashamed, embarrassed, and deeply hurt. That's what we teach our children, stereotypes.

Misunderstanding of Native people is at a crossroads. Right now you can teach the next generation of new students or go on with stereotypes. It's in your power.

Good afternoon Senator Mitchell, Representative Richard, and the members of the committee.

I am Allison Smith-Poulin. In today's society children grow up with little understanding of "Indians", the people that walk the streets, grocery shop, and basically live with them.

When most children think of Indians, they think of savage men with paint smeared all over their bodies running around with feathers tied around their waist screaming in foreign tongue. At least that's what I thought when I was younger.

Passing this bill would let children have a better understanding of their ancestors and neighbors. I believe it would be the right thing to do.

Thank-you for the opportunity to testify.

Good afternoon Senator Mitchell, Representative Richard, and members of the committee.

I am Jeremy Furst. I believe we should learn about the American Native's Heritage, they study ours. I also think we should study their history, because they were in North America before we were. It would be interesting to study and learn the history of the Native Americans. I have always had an interest in the Native Americans' ways of life.

I believe most of the people of North America have some Indian heritage, even if only a small amount, and would find it inspiring to discover more about their own history. Yet I think along with the good we need to know the bad. I think it is important to know about the deaths of the many natives that occurred while others sought only to control those that were already here. The Native American's History needs to be told and taught. We the people of Maine need to know more about the history of our original forefathers.

Thank-you for the opportunity to testify.

Donna Marie Loring

From: Camille Beane <cammie@ctel.net>
To: Donna Marie Loring <dml dab@wiscasset.net>
Sent: Wednesday, February 14, 2001 9:07 PM
Subject: LD291

I wish to express my support for LD 291. I believe that the bill focuses attention on the important topic of Maine Indian Education. Maine schools are mandated to teach a variety of topics either overtly or in more subtle ways through the Maine Learning Results. I believe that one cannot teach Maine History in depth without consideration to her Native Peoples.

As a first grade teacher, I have had an interest in developing a unit of study focusing on Maine Indians. I have had some success gathering information and materials to plan such a unit of study. It is my understanding that LD 291 would create a commission which would study and recommend materials and workshops for classrooms, as well as mandate that Maine Indian Education be taught. I believe that such a study would be invaluable in collecting resources which assist educators in preparing units of study which would help all Maine children to develop an appreciation and understanding of the culture and people who were the first inhabitants of our state.

I was appalled to learn from a recent newspaper article that there are more than a few Maine residents who are unaware that Maine has its own Indians. Surely this is a situation which we should try to correct.



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Dear Donna Loring:

I attended your lecture at the University of Maine this past Monday and want to express my support for your efforts to make Maine Indian History central to the curriculum in our primary and secondary schools. Like all my colleagues in the Department of History, we strongly believe that understanding our past is essential for an informed and healthy citizenry. Native American perspectives have without question been ignored, and in most cases abused, at all levels of American education.

The History Department at the University of Maine has several faculty members whose work as scholars and teachers can contribute directly to your efforts to make Maine Indian History a meaningful part of children's education in our state. Jacques Ferland's research focuses on Penobscots and his French fluency makes him a particularly valuable resource for assessing important French-language evidence. Two others members of our Department (Martha McNamara and Richard Judd) teach Maine History every year (course number HTY 210). As they have developed the curriculum for HTY 210 over the past decade, they have carefully integrated Native views and experiences as essential to a full understanding of our past. Some of the fruits of this scholarship can be seen in Richard W. Judd, Edwin A. Churchill, Joel W. Eastman, editors, Maine : The Pine Tree State From Prehistory To The Present (University of Maine Press, 1995). Several essays in this collection centrally examine Native Americans in Maine, while many more integrate Native actions and experiences along with other issues.

In addition to the three specialists mentioned above whose work as scholars and teachers is directly relevant to your effort, others in this Department (as well as in other areas of the University) would be interested in participating in the campaign to make Maine Indian History a more central part of our schools' curriculum. My own area of specialization is Colonial and Revolutionary America with a special interest in the Mid-Atlantic region. While not deeply informed about Maine, my work as a teacher centrally examines contact and conflict among Native Americans and Europeans. If you want to contact one of my colleagues mentioned above (I've spoken to all of them about writing this letter) they can be reached by phone through the History Department's central office (581-1908). Please do not hesitate to reach me if I can be of any assistance, my contact information appears below.

I appreciate your efforts to make this important addition to the curriculum of our public schools.

Sincerely,

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