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March 17, 2021  
Zoom 10:00 AM

In **SUPPORT** of House Bill 6619  
*An Act Concerning the Development of a Kindergarten to Eighth Grade  
Model Curriculum*

Chairman McCrory, Chairman Sanchez, and distinguished members of the Education Committee, I am here to testify in **support** of House Bill 6619, *An Act Concerning the Development of a Kindergarten to Eighth Grade Model Curriculum*.

For the transcript, my name is Cathy Osten and I represent the 19th Senate District, which includes the towns of Columbia, Franklin, Hebron, Lebanon, Ledyard, Lisbon, Marlborough, Montville, Norwich, and Sprague.

As you may recall, earlier this session, I introduced Senate Bill 249, *An Act Concerning the Inclusion of Native American Studies in the Social Studies Curriculum*. I would like to begin my remarks by thanking the leadership of the committee for including the provisions of SB 249 in the important legislation pending before you today.

The political philosopher Edmund Burke famously quipped, "Those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it." Connecticut's history, and surely, that of New England, is a deep and rich one. However, too often in the classroom, examination of this history is compressed into a review of the so called first Thanksgiving and colonial America during the American Revolution. Almost nothing is mentioned of the time preceding this as if people found an empty land that was not already inhabited with peoples who had communities, government structures, religion and all other tenets of a complex life.

One of our largest strengths is the diversity within our great state, and it is crucial that we continue the work we started during the 2019 session when we passed HB 7082, *An Act Concerning the Inclusion of African American Studies in the Public-School Curriculum*.

As you may know, Connecticut is home to five state-recognized tribal nations: the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation, Mohegan Tribe, Eastern Pequot Tribal Nation, Golden Hill Paugussett Tribal Nation, and the Schaghticoke Tribal Nation. This is something we should be proud of but consistently we have sought to not honor these relationships, playing loose with agreed upon compacts. While there exists an Office of Indian Affairs within the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, most of these tribal nations are ignored when it comes to health and wellbeing of tribal members, the maintenance of and respect of their tribal lands, and other matters. There have been circumstances when structures have been removed without knowledge and approval of the respective tribe while conversely lands to be protected have been allowed to go fallow without care. I introduced legislation this year, Senate Bill 162, *An Act Concerning Management of Reservation Lands and Tribal Services* which in part, provides a plan to aid the Schaghticoke Tribal Nation with the costs of building a retaining wall on tribal lands; lands that had flooded from the construction of a nearby hydroelectric plant, the construction and flooding was authorized by the Connecticut General Assembly. It is well known that the impoundment caused by the hydro plant flooded the tribe's historic burying grounds, bodies of ancestors remain under water today.

In a November 26, 2020 editorial, The New London Day Editorial Board rightfully observed that, "Generations of students of Native American heritage have sat through history lessons in which their culture was ignored, misrepresented or just barely mentioned...the history curriculum taught in most Connecticut classrooms generally does not go much deeper than somewhat cursory mentions of native culture."

On the same day that The Day editorial was published, the Hartford Courant ran a story by Susan Dunne, entitled "The 'first' Thanksgiving wasn't the first. Connecticut Native Americans talk about the origins of the beloved holiday". In this article, Ms. Dunne chronicles how the "First" Thanksgiving was only a first for the newly arrived European settlers and how native peoples had celebrated the harvest every autumn. To this day, the Feast of Green Corn and Dance (also known as "Schemitzun") is celebrated annually by the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation in Ledyard. While we were saddened that the event had to be cancelled last year due to the coronavirus pandemic, speaking for myself, I very much look forward to when we can celebrate this great event later this year.

We are long overdue for an update in the way we teach our shared history. There will undoubtedly be parts of our past that are uncomfortable to learn about, but those uncomfortable parts are as crucial, if not more so, to be aware of, lest we be doomed to repeat the follies of our ancestors. We in Connecticut have such a rich and deep collection of different and unique cultures. Unfortunately, heretofore, we know extraordinarily little about them because that history is avoided in social studies curriculum.

In my view, we perform a great disservice to ourselves and our children if we continue to choose to ignore Connecticut's First Peoples place in the history of what we now know as Connecticut. For example, did you know that the naming of the Thames River came about after John Mason tortured, burned alive and sold into slavery the survivors of the Pequot Massacre. To absolve ourselves we changed the name from the Pequot River or the Great River of Pequot to the Thames River. This disservice also extends to our continued use of mascots, team names,

and logos that are offensive to Native Americans. That is why, earlier this session, I also introduced Senate Bill 438, *An Act Prohibiting the Use of Native American Mascots in Public Schools*. As you recall, in the last few years, the towns of Killingly and Watertown heavily debated this issue with mixed results. Some Towns have chosen to remove such caricatures willingly but not all. There should be a state policy on this issue.

We also dishonor our fellow citizens when we refuse to remove statues of historical figures and other public displays that depict offensive and often inaccurate episodes from our state's past. I was honored to be joined by my Democrat and Republican colleagues in both the House and Senate in introducing Senate Bill 224, *An Act Concerning the Removal and Replacement of Certain Depictions of Indigenous People and Historical Statutes within Legislative Buildings*. I was disheartened and disappointed, however, when the Joint Committee on Legislative Management did not take any action on this proposal. In my view, there is no justifiable reason whatsoever to continue to allow the display of the John Mason statue on the State Capitol's dome. I believe that the statue of John Mason, who led the colonial torture, burning alive and massacre of the Pequots in 1637, ought to be removed to a museum and presented with educational context.

The Eastern Pequots and Schaghticoke's applied for and received federal recognition. The state, fearful of this recognition, fought it, ultimately overturning the decision. I found it to be most insightful that notice of this action was delivered to the tribes on Columbus Day. Therefore, I introduced Senate Bill 182, *An Act Establishing Indigenous Peoples Day*.

Each of the Tribal Nations has a story that needs telling with just a cursory review of history you will see how badly Connecticut has treated it's First Peoples. Let us recognize what happened and tell their stories in each school, each class and remember ignorance is not acceptable.

In closing, there is so much more we can learn about the peoples and cultures that make up the great diversity in our state. Developing sound curriculum, from primary source materials, and including said curriculum in our public schools is long overdue. Let history judge us, in this moment, for taking the positive and necessary steps toward a more inclusive society.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in **support** of House Bill 6619. I look forward to working with the leadership and members of this committee on this bill's passage.