

Dear Representative Webb,

I am writing to strongly support passage of S. 139 relating to the public school team mascot bill, which is now before the House Education Committee.

I am currently the chair of the Danville School District Board, and sat on the board as a member during the recent process to retire our mascot, which was done by a policy change. I was pleased to watch along as a spectator as the renaming process played out in the hands of a committee that included community, school and student stakeholders, who made a decision based on that policy and voted to become the Bears. I could not be more pleased to have had the primary stakeholders, the students of the school, be given agency to make that decision.

The board level decision to retire the Native American sports symbol should have been far easier and done many years ago. Evidence had been presented starting in Danville in 1999 about harm being done to students as a result of the culture at Danville School. When the public forums started again in 2021, those people came back, nearly all, and once again shared their history and demonstrated their wounds to our board, either in person or in writing. Our forums had many Native American attendees who knew they couldn't change what happened to them, but wanted to finally change what happened going forward.

The harm was demonstrable via testimony, but the harm caused by the cartoonish and racist depictions of Native Americans is also demonstrable through science. In researching this, the foremost scientific study I saw was from the American Psychological Association. The summary of their resolution can be found here, written in plain English.

<https://www.apa.org/pi/oema/resources/indian-mascots>

This harm, the callous disregard for a race of people and the culture that disregard engenders, is anathema to equity, diversity and inclusion. It has to change. S. 139 is before your committee now allowing you this opportunity.

In Danville, we were able to use an upwelling from inside the school from a student as well as the downward pressure provided by the VPA statement in August 2020 to open the debate wide and to begin collecting evidence and testimony about a potential change. A motion made by our board allowing this to be a teaching topic inside the building was a sea change from the school's past. This allowed all stakeholders to have a say.

We solicited communication from the community. We publicly asked for letters, testimonials, data and concerns and got hundreds of them. We followed that up with informational meetings at which we exhausted public comment. We allowed people to speak and make their cases for and against until there was no one left to speak or speak again.

The policy was then written, warned and passed. The policy (<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#inbox/FMfcgzGmvfZXfbgXBVPNGdrCrwdbRMxH?project=1&messagePartId=0.1>) reasoning for retiring the mascot was its divisiveness, which had been evident in the community for years, but also the clear indicators that it was harmful to the culture, to the students and to the learning at our school.

The harm is tangible, the harm is quantifiable, and the harm has been studied at length. It is easy for any talk of harm to veer off into conversations on offensiveness, or the lack thereof, but the psychological harm done to children by these mascots has been demonstrated time and again.

Then I would ask that you please take a look, if you have not, at the findings of the Vermont Task Force on Racial Equity, published January 2021 ([https://racialequity.vermont.gov/sites/reap/files/doc\\_library/RETF-Report-2-Final.pdf](https://racialequity.vermont.gov/sites/reap/files/doc_library/RETF-Report-2-Final.pdf)) These are your peers in governance in Vermont. Their findings and conclusions are as concise as they are stark. There is no honor in misrepresentation. That finding matches the testimony we received from Vermont Native tribes, and the Vermont Council on Native American Affairs. They all support a change and want to move forward from this.

It is incumbent on you to act. In no small part because in the places where these debates have only just been taken up, like Rutland, it may take another 20 years to get this done organically. Legislation will make necessary that they do the right thing, which may feel like the hard thing.

I would be happy to have a conversation with any of you, or with all of you if you desire. I can be reached at this email address or by telephone at 802-748-0012.

Respectfully,  
Clayton Cargill - Chair  
Danville School Board