

Jenna Montgomery-Concha

February 10, 2022

Vermont S.139 Testimony

*Note: Actual testimony was slightly different due to the fact that I merely used this as a guideline, but both testimonies accurately reflect my views. Small discrepancies in rhetoric do not indicate any sort of disbelief on my end.*

Hello! My name is Jenna Montgomery Concha and I am a senior at Rutland High School. when discussing the mascot issue in Vermont it's hard to neglect the current situation in Rutland. I was a student leader of the group that originally got the mascot changed, I provided comments to the school board, the board of aldermen, and more. Similar to Bella, I am also recently of voting age and look forward to voting in the upcoming municipal elections.

Now I'll start off by saying I wish I wasn't here talking to you all today. I wish I didn't have to. We should not be having this conversation at all. We have man on the moon. We do not need to have harmful monikers of indigenous people on the football field but never the less here we are. It doesn't take an intellect to see that we are on unceded land. The exact social conditions that allowed for me to be speaking here today are the same ones allowing for inappropriate mascotry to represent high schools all over the country. Now, I wish that we could have an indigenous person here today speaking in my place. The standpoint epistemology-aided position that can be provided by an indigenous student directly impacted by this issue at Rutland High School would be invaluable. Unfortunately, the Raider does not allow for this. The Raider creates an

environment of hate rather than one of radical compassion and the free flow of ideas, which is what I'm sure we all want. Students do not want to speak up, the Raider often will not allow for it.

From my own position, I can tell you why I don't think that it is possible to have an effective conversation with the current mascot at RHS in place. The most significant driving factor in our argument to get the mascot changed in the first place was that ethnic-based mascots are universally damaging to all students. The American Psychological Association and many other peer-reviewed studies back this claim. "WHEREAS the continued use of American Indian mascots, symbols, images, and personalities undermines the educational experiences of members of all communities-especially those who have had little or no contact with Indigenous peoples". It also states that such mascots allow for a hostile educational climate, and they firmly advocate for the retirement of such mascots effective immediately.

It is important to look at both the intrinsic qualities of a symbol and those that we gave it as a society via contextualization. Is a Raider inherently racist? No. However, in Rutland, we have contextualized it throughout our own history to represent Indigenous peoples, even featuring a chief's head as our logo for quite some time. News headlines and signs at football games would read "Raiders scalp the mounties" and other phrases directed specifically at Native Americans. For this reason, the word took on a unique meaning—perhaps not one that appears in the dictionary—but a meaning nonetheless.

I have seen the social climate that the Raider has allowed for. A mascot representing a school is supposed to unite the student body. How can a student body stand united when students such as

myself are receiving death threats from full-grown adults because I tried to get a mascot changed. How can a student body stand united when people's opinions in completely unrelated discussions are reduced to their views on the mascot issue. Now, don't get me wrong. Being pejoratively referred to as "Raven Girl" in random contexts is somewhat humorous, but it is not productive. how can a student body stand united when cheering at a sporting event becomes a political issue. we cannot. No one can.

We saw similar climates arising all over Vermont from South Burlington to Rutland to Danville. As my classmate Isabella corroborated, If any of you have been able to witness the Rutland school board meetings recently you will see that we have a select few board members who ran purely on the platform of reverting the mascot. This is evident when you hear any other issues coming up because the group cannot effectively debate on issues such as teacher pensions, honoring middle schoolers who got recognized in prestigious essay competitions, or anything of substance beyond the mascot issue. The Raider allowed for this. Our school board meetings have crumbled to something akin to young children yelling at each other and arguing at lunch table over who has the best fruit snacks. The Raider allows for this.

Now do not get me wrong—I am an advocate for small-level government. I think that officials have a much better idea of what their constituents want when it's on a level as small as Rutland. Unfortunately, however our governing bodies have demonstrated that this is not an issue that they can handle alone. Our community has tried to turn to majority voting to absolve minority issues, which at its core, will not effectively solve the problem. When dealing with a marginalized group,

its likely that the social conditions allowing for this marginalization in the first place will not allow for effective handling of said minority issue. This is historically unobjectionable.

There's ample evidence to support the Banning of ethnic-based mascots and little to none to support the contrary. The reigning arguments we hear from the other side include the preservation of tradition and history. This I find ironic because our state in particular has questionable history surrounding our treatment of indigenous peoples, having gained national attention in academia of the 1900s for the eugenics programs that our own University of Vermont sponsored. As for the education argument, we have not had any formal education on indigenous history and if we had this conversation would probably not be occurring.

As for the funding issue, the numbers surpassing 200 thousand dollars were largely a rumor originating from a particular board of aldermen meeting and, to my knowledge, have not been corroborated by a financial analyst or accountant.

Like I said earlier I really wish I wasn't here today. But seeing as I am, I am happy to help or contribute in any way possible.

*APA Statement Referenced:* <https://www.apa.org/about/policy/mascots.pdf>