

To: Vermont Senate Education Committee

Re: Bill S.139

I am writing to state my support for Bill S. 139 which seeks the elimination of ethnic-themed mascots in Vermont Schools. I am a Native American writer and historian and an enrolled citizen of the Nulhegan Abenaki.

I realize that this is an emotional issue for many. This includes not just "ethnic" people and communities, but also past and former students and members of communities where a school's ethnic mascot (usually with a name that references in some fashion American Indian culture) has been a source of pride.

In fact, there are even groups which purport to represent a Native American point of view—such as the so-called Native American Guardian Association—that oppose eliminating such stereotyped symbols and, quite frankly, often dismiss the feelings of actual Indigenous communities. Nor do they consider the mental health of Native students in schools with such mascots who have had to endure feeling belittled or being teased.

I am personally opposed to the use—without the permission and approval—of any ethnic group's names, symbols, or objects of material culture as sports mascots. I've actually discussed this issue within two of my books for younger readers, *THE HEART OF A CHIEF* and *THE WARRIORS*, which are widely used in schools throughout the nation.

I should point out that in almost every case, ethnic-themed mascots relate in some fashion to Native Americans. For some reason, "Indians" are more attractive to those seeking to adopt a mascot. It is similar to the way in which certain words—which sometimes do derive from indigenous languages are used, even though contemporary Native people view those words as insulting. "Squaw," "papoose," and "brave," are some of those words and are as demeaning as the N-word.

Why is it that we have had major sports teams until very recently such as the Cleveland Indians and the Washington Redskins, but not teams with such names (which I believe everyone would agree are wrong and insensitive) as the Atlanta African Americans, the Chicago Chicanos, or the Jacksonville Jews?

Getting back to that issue I touched upon regarding the attachment felt to Native American team mascots, I have heard non-Native people say in defense of their school mascot— "I'm an Indian, my father was a Indian, and so was my grandfather." Try substituting some other ethnic Identity for "Indian," such as "African American" and see how that sounds to you.

I hope this may be of some assistance in making the decision regarding this bill.

Thank you for your attention.

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