

We are the Vermont Student Anti-Racism Network, a student led organization that has the mission to promote anti-racism in schools. We do this through creating lesson plans, supporting policy, and spreading awareness. We strive to foster inclusive, anti-racist, diverse schools across the state of Vermont. We are writing testimony today in support of a bill that will further this mission - by removing racist mascots from schools.

S.139 would remove all mascots “that have or adopt a name, symbol, or image that depicts or refers to a racial or ethnic group, individual, custom, or tradition and that is used as a mascot, nickname, logo, letterhead, or team name of the school.” This bill would have ripple effects for students statewide at multiple schools. Students of color, and all students, feel strong negative effects of a racist mascot. It dehumanizes people and promotes racial inequities in the school. If Vermont as a state truly cares about our students, we will pass S.139 swiftly.

Across the country, hundreds of schools harbor mascots with racist symbolism. Our nation has a long history of enslavement, wars, colonization, and racial inequality that we need to reckon with. How can we have a reckoning when our schools still use dehumanizing mascots? Indigenous and Black Americans are 1.3x more likely to die from disease, including COVID-19, than white Americans. There are much higher rates of poverty in Indigenous communities, as well, and the disparities in wealth between White and Indigenous Americans is high - the poverty rate for Native Americans is 25.4%, 17.6% being the national rate. These disparities are going to persist until we dedicate ourselves to eradicating racism...and the first step in that journey is removing racist mascots and changing how we view different cultures.

If we as a state want to strengthen our commitment to anti-racism, it's time to pass S.139 and support ALL students in fostering an inclusive environment. Our state could be a model to the nation in promoting anti-racism, and it starts with this bill.

Please pass S. 139 and ensure humanity and inclusivity for young Vermonters.