

STATEMENT OF SUPPORT
Senate Bill S.139

Calls for public schools to not 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.

To the Senate Committee on Education:

I support this bill for multiple reasons. I am a mixed-race person, and I am both Irish and American Indian. I am also part ethnically Jewish, as my great-grandmother was a Jewish Holocaust survivor, though I grew up Christian. Both Irish and American Indian Mascots promote a culture of stereotyping that affects everyone, and they specifically promote stereotypes that make it harder for us to participate fully in the modern American society.

Some Irish mascots, such as the Notre Dame Fighting Irish, promote the stereotype that Irish people are drunks and fighters. Sometimes, we internalize these stereotypes and then take on these roles because we have been told by society that this is what we are. Other Irish mascots, like the Boston Celtics, seem to depict Irish people as tricksters, not to be trusted. Because of these stereotypes, we are often judged to be neither honest nor dependable, and this implicit bias affects how we are judged when we apply for jobs, seek healthcare, or are interrogated by someone in a position of authority.

American Indian mascots also promote stereotypes and dehumanize us. American Indian mascots often depict us as stoic and warlike. If people subscribe to these stereotypes about us, it becomes difficult for us to apply for jobs or be included in other major functions of society. Many traditional American Indian men gravitate toward jobs like education, social services, or healthcare—helping professions. When we are perceived as stoic and warlike, this is not compatible with jobs in helping professions. When I graduated with my master's degree in counseling, I applied for jobs in Vermont, but I simply could not convince employers that my minority status would not prevent me from doing the job. I was grateful that they were willing to be honest about what the problem was, but it did not help me get a job. I ended up moving to Hawaii, the least white state in the United States, where being a minority was not as much of a problem. On my path home, I took a job in Philadelphia, a majority black city. Now, I am in Burlington. If I had not been subject to harmful stereotypes, I could have been employed in Vermont years ago.

Racist mascots and imagery create hostile work environments and hostile learning environments. If we do not allow a swastika in our schools, then we should not allow racist mascots or their apparel into our schools. Eventually, someone is going to start suing schools because of the racism they faced, as a student or as an employee, from the presence of these swastikas—I mean, racist mascots. Let's remove them from our schools before that happens.

I respectfully request that you support and pass this bill.

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