

Dear Senate Education Committee Members,

My name is Luna Burkland, and I am a sophomore at Green Mountain Union High School.

I have played soccer and basketball at GM since seventh grade, and last year I started school here full time.

Everytime I hear someone yell, "Go Chieftains!" from the sidelines, everytime I see a sweatshirt or jersey with the chieftain logo on it, everytime I visit the GM website, everytime I put on my practice pinnie, everytime I walk in the main doors of GM and see the giant painted Native American Chieftain head prominently displayed in the gallery, I am overcome with a mixture of guilt, embarrassment, anger, and frustration.

I feel guilty that I participate in activities that are associated with GM, I also feel guilty that I have not yet managed to get the chieftain changed to a less dated mascot. I feel partly responsible for how everyone accepts it as okay, like it's not harming our very minds and thinking processes.

I feel embarrassed when our teams are announced at sporting events, when our mascot is announced for the whole world to hear. It is embarrassing for me, but for Native peoples (and know that I am not speaking for them here, I cannot speak for an entire civilization) it is seen as just another reminder of how white people came and took over, making almost everything theirs – even their cultural practices, after they were banned from practicing it in the first place.

I am angry that this mascot, and so many others like it, have been allowed to exist for so long. I feel angry that people continue to support it – people who have no cultural ties to it whatsoever, and who refuse to listen to the thousands of Native peoples protesting these very mascots.

I am frustrated at how stubborn and unaware people can be. How can they refuse to see that what they support and praise provokes uproars around the country? How can they cling to a stereotype that causes such mental damage, to Native, and Non-Native children alike? I am frustrated that it is we the students who have to rise up and declare this wrongdoing on our predecessors' part. I am frustrated at how hard it is to make positive change. Why does every action have to have an equal, or greater, opposite reaction?

Many of my peers may argue that the Chieftain mascot honors the Native peoples, many adults may agree with them, but multiple Natives have insisted that, "there is no honor in being somebody's mascot." Non-Natives don't get to decide what is, or is not racist, only Natives can do so, and when they declare something is racist, it is not a privileged person's place to argue.

Many dedicated alumni may insist that the Chieftain mascot is a tradition, that they have good memories associated with it, and therefore it should not be changed. To this I say, if a

tradition is harmful, then it should not continue. If you have good memories about your highschool days, then that has nothing to do with the mascot. If you have memories of being proud of the mascot, that for you it stood for bravery and courage, then you were not told the whole story. You were not aware of the millions of people it was affecting.

In the GMUHS Student Handbook, it says that to achieve the Two Rivers Supervisory Union's Vision Statement, GMUHS: "teaches empathy, compassion, responsibility, and respect." and, "aspires to be citizens of a diverse democracy and changing world." How can you teach empathy, compassion, responsibility, or respect when you do not exhibit it yourself? What would be a better opportunity to be "citizens of a diverse democracy and changing world" than to rid ourselves of a mascot that was installed in the 1970's?

The GMUHS mission statement is: "Green Mountain is an educational community committed to helping students develop to their fullest potential and be responsible individuals." If the school is not held responsible for changing the mascot, then what kind of example is that setting for the students? How are we supposed to develop to our fullest potential when our school harbors a mascot that insinuates racism and bigotry?

I am here to say that I stand for changing this mascot that offends thousands of people. I am just one voice among a chorus of others, whether they are silent or vocal.

Regards,

Luna Burkland