

Hello, I am Isabella LaFemina of Rutland City. i am a senior at rutland high and i am now of voting age.

my position as senior school board representative really drew me into this issue; it's been on the agenda since my first meeting on the board. Here we are, months of meetings later with still no resolution. I fear for my school system, because the "modeled behavior" from this board is indecisiveness and argumentative. i fear that my school is perpetuating inadequate education around this issue and pushing it under the rug.

i want to be quite forward, when i started on the board, i didn't understand why my mascot needed to change. i had no idea of it's connotations until i saw an amazing presentation, one done along with jenna. it opened my eyes to what kind of place vermont needs to be in order to call ourselves a welcoming community.

i've currently been working on an article for a news service to post about the different opinions from our district's students on this specific issue. i've learned a lot about the variability in indigenous education in my school, and i'm not surprised about the similarity in answers. "it's always been that way. my mom was a raider. my kids are gonna be raiders." just because it's been normalized does not mean it's right. it's sad to see how uneducated our school population is on the issue, and these athletic kids are creating a bandwagon appeal that underclassmen can't resist. "ooh jimmy likes the raiders and i don't want jimmy to not like me so i'm gonna like the raider too, since i have no idea what it stands for." these kids need adult guidance to know what serious consequences our future could have if we continue these forms of appropriation.

i feel so strongly that my city school board cannot make this decision alone. in 2021 we became ravens. our "raider" supporters forced our board to spend hundreds of dollars to higher professionals to analyze whether the vote was

taken properly. after it was granted a good vote status, elections came and candidates ran purely on the stance of bringing back the raider name. this past month, the board members have bickered, called each other names, even said nasty things to students like me, and somehow we have circled back to this racist mascot.

recently, my school's dynamic has been far from pleasant. months of fights and disrespectful language has brought us to this place. are we raiders? are we ravens? the students look up to the adults that run their system, which i think causes this inappropriate discourse i encounter at rutland high. if the elected officials act that way, then why can't i? no matter what someone's opinion might be on this bill, i think we are all in agreement about one thing; school boards cannot be the deciding factor for the indigenous mascot issue.

i appreciate every educational opportunity i've had through all of this school board drama, which i'm sure most of you have seen at least

one screaming fight from the rcps school board, but i'm ready for it to be over. i think the local political groups have proven that they cannot handle this issue on their own, and i think that rutland high school, or any school in our position for that matter, is ready to hand it over to the state government for assistance. id love to see this bill move forward because i don't want all of my hard work to be for nothing. i know everyone else that has worked closely with this argument feels the same. more importantly, i want to see justice for indigenous people in our area, after years of being treated as only a mascot.

Thanks so much
Isabella LaFemina