



STATE OF VERMONT
SENATE CHAMBER
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**Testimony of Sen. Dick McCormack
to the Senate Committee on Education
S.139 regarding school mascots
February 1,2022**

Mr. Chairman and Committee, thank you for allowing me to speak to you today. For the record I am Senator Richard McCormack representing Windsor County and the towns of Mount Holley and Londonderry. I am the Chief Sponsor of Senate Bill139 which addresses school mascots. S.139 prohibits public schools from using ethnic or racial groups as mascots. Why should we do this?

First because it is insulting and demeaning for one group to use another group as a mascot. It is an exercise in one group's power over another. It is demeaning to the designated group. Please note, I said mascot, not insulting mascot. Because simply making someone a mascot is insulting in and of itself. But, of course, an insulting stereotypical mascot is extra insulting.

While no one should be demeaned or insulted because of his/her race or ethnicity, this is especially true of public-school students. Every child in Vermont has a constitutional right to a public education. It is unconscionable for a student who is of a marginalized group to be subjected to humiliation as a price of accessing a constitutional right.

Second, it is a well-established constitutional principle that, while government may delegate authority, it may not delegate responsibility. For centuries the Vermont State Government has delegated its authority over education to local communities. Vermonters are justly protective of those powers. But those powers are delegated by the State, and the State is ultimately responsible for seeing to it that schools are properly run. This is not about state vs local power. It is about the State's DUTY to protect the rights of the children of Vermont.

Third, citizenship training and character development are not only a legitimate part of public education, they are original purposes, going back through Horace Mann to Thomas Jefferson. Mascots not only hurt members of the insulted groups, they hurt majority kids as well, by creating the impression that disrespect is acceptable. We should be teaching our kids, including white kids, to respect their fellow human beings, their fellow Americans, their fellow Vermonters, their school mates.

I'm familiar with the arguments against this initiative. I've already spoken to the state's duty in the matter. This is not a legislative overreach or an abuse of local control.

I also hear that we should respect the will of the majority if a community votes to insult students of color. But an injustice is not made just by the tyranny of the majority. I hear that mascots are traditions about which alumni feel deeply. No doubt this is true, but nostalgic school pride is a lesser concern than decency towards our kids. I've heard that supporters of demeaning mascots mean no harm, may even mean the mascots as "tributes". To aggrieved alumni I say this isn't about you. It's about the innocent people you're demeaning and insulting. To deliberately insult is a sin of commission, but to ignore the objections of those being insulted is a sin of omission.

I suggest this bill makes sense. Let's stop insulting our kids.

Senator Dick McCormack