

April 2, 2013
RE: Opposing HB 3397, SB 215, SB 501

Dear House Committee on Education,

There is a growing body of evidence about the civil rights violation that occurs when Native Americans, our smallest racial minority, are used as public school mascots. The State Board of Education gathered a great deal of evidence about that to produce the ban in May 2012. However the “ask” to get rid of racist Indian mascots goes back to the US Civil Rights Commission declaration of 1991 which I post at the end of this document.

After the Oregon Board of Education produced the ban, the State of Washington followed with its ban. Now, the State of Michigan is going to the Federal level regarding the civil rights violation presented by stereotyping Native Americans. I interviewed Mr. Levy, the Michigan Civil Rights lawyer who wrote the brief now under consideration at Federal level, on the phone yesterday.

Mr. Levy said his state is so aware of the bullying and harassment that can befall students who have complained about Indian mascots that they will not release the names to the Federal Civil Rights investigation. That speaks to how difficult it is for our children to face bullying, racism and harassment by speaking out against it. Mr. Levy noted that as in Oregon several Michigan Tribes support banning Indian mascots and he sent me their resolutions against being stereotyped.

It is up to you to vote NO on these bills which seek to take away the protection the mascot ban was designed to produce.

Michigan’s brief (linked and quoted below) explains that studies show that not only Native American students suffer lower self-esteem when faced with racist Indian mascots but the *“consequence of exposure to the American Indian mascot is increased stereotyping of other racial minorities.”*

I do not believe my elected officials have the professional depth of knowledge to reverse the strong body of evidence posted by our ODE. **With Rudy Crew’s stated goal to bring all segments of our school population to higher success rates, you clearly would do a great deal of damage to racial minorities if you void the ban.** I support vigorous civil rights protection for all segments of Oregon’s society.

Please vote NO on HB 3397, SB 215 and SB 501.

Please read the compelling excerpt below from the Michigan brief - it outlines the harm done to all minorities and questions how The stereotyping of any racial, ethnic, religious or other groups when promoted by our public educational institutions, teach all students that stereotyping of minority groups is acceptable, a dangerous lesson in a diverse

society. any responsible School Districts could continue to support these racist symbols in the face of the body of research.

Then consider the 1991 US Civil Rights resolution regarding ending Indian mascots also posted below which states in part: *“The stereotyping of any racial, ethnic, religious or other groups when promoted by our public educational institutions, teach all students that stereotyping of minority groups is acceptable, a dangerous lesson in a diverse society.”* Given that 1991 Civil Rights Commission resolution, Oregon is actually over 20 years behind the times on the Indian mascot civil rights issue.

Sincerely,
Susan Hansen
PO Box 50, Molalla Oregon 97038

Link to Michigan’s brief:

http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdcr/MDCR_2_8_13_Supporting_Argument_410857_7.pdf

Excerpt from brief:

“That the use of American Indian mascots and imagery causes actual and disproportionate harm to American Indian students should be a sufficient basis for finding that it is discriminatory and must not be permitted to continue. However, OCR need not base a finding of discrimination solely on the disparate impact the mascots have. **When a school continues to use American Indian mascots knowing that they “have (1) negative psychological consequences for American Indians, (2) positive Psychological consequences for European Americans, and (3) negative effects on race relations” there is a sufficient basis for OCR to impute bad intent or at least deliberate indifference.**

How profound is the effect of mascots on self-esteem? At least one study found that being exposed to American Indian mascots lowered the self-esteem of American Indian High school students significantly more than exposure to negative stereotypes like alcoholism, dropout rates and suicide.

While not related to the disparate effect, there has also been significant research concerning the effects of exposure to mascots on non-American Indian students. A stereotypic portrayal has negative effects on those who are not targets of the stereotype and can have the effect of creating a racially hostile educational environment for all students. **Even where the intention of the depiction may have been to honor a particular tribe, the consequence of exposure to the American Indian mascot is increased stereotyping of other racial minorities.**

The study by Kim-Prieto found that individuals who are exposed to American Indian mascots and stereotypic portrayals will heighten their stereotyping of Asian Americans. **Racial priming via the American Indian mascots increases the tendency to endorse stereotypes about other minority groups.** Furthermore, increased exposure to stereotypes results in greater reliance on those stereotypes when making interpersonal evaluations in work and academic settings.

Reliance on any stereotype appears to increase along with exposure to stereotypes, regardless of whom the stereotype is portraying. Although this particular harm affects all students and thus does not increase the equal opportunity gap between them, it is still indicative of a schools indifference to the negative consequences of the mascots use

American Indian mascots go beyond being merely offensive. The use of American Indian mascots has been demonstrated to cause actual psychological harm to American Indian students. Persistent racial stereotyping also has the effect of decreasing academic performance in members of a targeted racial group. **When using American Indian mascots, educational institutions are abandoning their obligation to American Indian students by failing to provide them an equal opportunity to participate in or benefit from the educational services and activities being provided.**" End quoted material

2001 NEWS RELEASES, PRESS ADVISORIES AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

STATEMENT OF U.S. COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS ON THE USE OF NATIVE AMERICAN IMAGES AND NICKNAMES AS SPORTS SYMBOLS

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights calls for an end to the use of Native American images and team names by non-Native schools. The Commission deeply respects the rights of all Americans to freedom of expression under the First Amendment and in no way would attempt to prescribe how people can express themselves. However, the Commission believes that the use of Native American images and nicknames in school is insensitive and should be avoided. In addition, some Native American and civil rights advocates maintain that these mascots may violate anti-discrimination laws. These references, whether mascots and their performances, logos, or names, are disrespectful and offensive to American Indians and others who are offended by such stereotyping. They are particularly inappropriate and insensitive in light of the long history of forced assimilation that American Indian people have endured in this country.

Since the civil rights movement of the 1960s many overtly derogatory symbols and images offensive to African-Americans have been eliminated. However, many secondary schools, post-secondary institutions, and a number of professional sports teams continue to use Native American nicknames and imagery. Since the 1970s, American Indian leaders and organizations have vigorously voiced their opposition to these mascots and team names because they mock and trivialize Native American religion and culture.

It is particularly disturbing that Native American references are still to be found in educational institutions, whether elementary, secondary or post-secondary. Schools are places where diverse groups of people come together to learn not only the "Three Rs," but also how to interact respectfully with people from different cultures. The use of stereotypical images of Native Americans by educational institutions has the potential to create a racially hostile educational environment that may be intimidating to Indian students. American Indians have the lowest high school graduation rates in the nation and even lower college attendance and graduation rates. The perpetuation of harmful stereotypes may exacerbate these problems.

The stereotyping of any racial, ethnic, religious or other groups when promoted by our public educational institutions, teach all students that stereotyping of minority groups is acceptable, a dangerous lesson in a diverse society. Schools have a responsibility to educate their students; they should not use their influence to perpetuate misrepresentations of any culture or people. Children at the elementary and secondary level usually have no choice about which school they attend. Further, the assumption that a college student may freely choose another educational institution if she feels uncomfortable around Indian-based imagery is a false one. Many factors, from educational programs to financial aid to proximity to home, limit a college student's choices. It is particularly onerous if the student must also consider whether or not the institution is maintaining a racially hostile environment for Indian students.

Schools that continue to use Indian imagery and references claim that their use stimulates interest in Native American culture and honors Native Americans. These institutions have simply failed to listen to the Native groups, religious leaders, and civil rights organizations that oppose these symbols. These Indian-based symbols and team names are not accurate representations of Native Americans. Even those that purport to be positive are romantic stereotypes that give a distorted view of the past. These false portrayals prevent non-Native Americans from understanding the true historical and cultural experiences of American Indians. Sadly, they also encourage biases and prejudices that have a negative effect on contemporary Indian people. These references may encourage interest in mythical "Indians" created by the dominant culture, but they block genuine understanding of contemporary Native people as fellow Americans.

The Commission assumes that when Indian imagery was first adopted for sports mascots it was not to offend Native Americans. However, the use of the imagery and traditions, no matter how popular, should end when they are offensive. We applaud those who have been leading the fight to educate the public and the institutions that have voluntarily discontinued the use of insulting mascots. Dialogue and education are the roads to understanding. The use of American Indian mascots is not a trivial matter. The Commission has a firm understanding of the problems of poverty, education, housing, and health care that face many Native Americans. The fight to eliminate Indian nicknames and images in sports is only one front of the larger battle to eliminate obstacles that confront American Indians. The elimination of Native American nicknames and images as sports mascots will benefit not only Native Americans, but all Americans. The elimination of stereotypes will make room for education about real

Indian people, current Native American issues, and the rich variety of American Indian cultures in our country.

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