



House Committee on Education
Phoenix Singer, Associated Students of Portland State University
Re: Opposition to HB 3397

Chair Gelser and members of the committee, my name is Phoenix Alexander Singer and I have written and sent in this testimony because sadly I couldn't be in the Oregon State Capitol the day of this hearing, but thought it too important not to write something on the subject of House Bill 3397, the bill declaring certain uses of Native American mascots as not being forms of discrimination. I am writing in opposition and I hope by the time the respected members of the committee finish reading this testimony that it will be clear as to why.

Because of my personal connection to the native community I feel especially strong about the subject of Native American mascots and so when I heard about House Bill 3397 I have to express that I and others were deeply upset that such legislation was even on the table for consideration since we have made such strides with the Board of Education. Often times, we are told that Native American mascots portray positive depictions of Indigenous peoples and that we should feel honored that such positive depictions of us in the Sports industry exist. We are told that nothing about Native American mascots promote stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination or racism towards Native Americans at all in any capacity. Our concerns are dismissed and more often than not, met with hostility and indifference to the impact it has on our community. Besides simply being dismissive of centuries of lived community experience with negative portrayals as uncivilizable but noble savages, it also is not confirmed by academic literature on this topic and in fact, current work suggests the complete opposite of these claims.

Far from being positive, mascot imagery such as Chief Wahoo (The Washington Redskins logo) has been shown to actually activate negative stereotypes and thoughts about Native American people in non-Natives after having been exposed to the logo (Freng, S.). Other research has shown that many non-Natives implicitly do not perceive Native American mascots as being positive representations of Native American people, meaning they associate negative attributes to Native American mascots (Chaney, J.). At the same time non-Natives associate and do not perceive any differences between actual Native Americans and Native American mascot imagery (Chaney, J.). The impact on Native American high school and college students has suggested that after having being exposed to Native American mascots, other representations (e.g. Disney's Pocohontas) and prevalent negative stereotypes about Native Americans, Native American students report lowered self-esteem, community worth and the possibility of future achievements (Fryberg, S.A.). Even after mascots have been banned however such as in the case of University of North Dakota's Fighting Sioux mascot, Native peoples receive heavily charged racial hostility and are associated with negative racial stereotypes, blaming them for the mascots having been banned (Steinfeldt, J.A.). In addition to the impact on Natives, other literature has also stated that when exposed to Native American sports icons, participants are more likely to endorse stereotypes about other racial groups (Kim-Prieto, C.). What this all suggests is that non-Natives implicitly do not see the difference between Native Americans and mascot representations of Native Americans, associate negative attributes to mascots, that exposure to such mascots actually activates negative stereotypes about Native Americans, that those negative stereotypes are used in hostility towards Native Americans after bans have occurred while mascots have an adverse psychological impact on Native American students in K-12+ and that exposure to Native American mascots actually causes negative stereotypes towards other racial groups to be endorsed by non-Natives. Essentially, the use of Native American mascots has a negative psychological and social impact on all groups involved and even those not the target the racial mascots.

The 2012 report to the State Board of Education on School's Use of Native American Mascots outlines other concerns including concrete examples of how this plays out in sport cultures where Native American mascots are involved. For instance,

- In Illinois, Native dolls were hung from trees and balconies when a rival team with a Native mascot was in town. (2012 Report to State Board of Education).
- In Arizona, "Scalp the Indians" was chalked in large letters on the lawn when a rival team with a Native mascot was in town.
- In South Dakota students wear "The Sioux Suck" shirts and chant this saying while playing a rival team with a Native mascot.
- The New York Post has headlines such as "Tribe on Warpath" and "Take the Tribe and Scalp 'Em" when the NY Yankees play the Cleveland Indians.
- High schools post "Scalp the Indians" when playing rival teams.

As outlined in the report, because of the documented impact the existence of Native American mascots have on all parties, many organizations have come out against them, including the United States Commission on Civil Rights in 2001, the American Psychological Association, the American Sociological Association and even the National Collegiate Athletic Association (2012 Report to State Board of Education).

This means several things when it comes to House Bill 3397. The first of which is that continuing a culture of Native American mascots in the state of Oregon will have a profound impact on the psychological health and educational success of students. It will also mean Oregon will be condoning negative racial behavior that contributes to the stigmatization of not only Native American students but all students. Thirdly, even with specific tribes agreeing, as is outlined in this piece of legislation, with the entity that is using a mascot that is associated with or represents that specific tribe, does not mean the impact is isolated to that tribe alone. Considering the association of mascots with Native peoples and Native peoples with negative attributes, this can only continue the stereotyping, even hostile and violent behavior expressed towards Natives in general. Considering the information given in this testimony, legislating that certain uses of Native American mascots are not discriminatory when a body of work shows they contribute to a vast amount of implicit and explicit discrimination would not only harm Native and non-Native alike. Finally, passing House Bill 3397 would be in direct opposition to the recommendations made by the 2012 report to the State Board of Education on this very subject of Native American mascots. I do not support HB 3397 and ask for the committee to vote it down. Our students depend on it.

Citations for claims made in this testimony:

School's Use of Native American Mascots: Report to [Oregon] State Board of Education (March 8, 2012).

Chaney, J., Burke, A. and Burkley, E. "Do American Indian Mascots = American Indian People? Examining Implicit Bias Towards American Indian People And American Indian Mascots." *American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research* 18.1 (2011): 42-62.

Freng, S. and Willis-Esqueda, C. "A Question of Honor: Chief Wahoo and American Indian Stereotype Activation Among a University Based Sample." *The Journal of Social Psychology* 151.5 (2011): 577-591.

Fryberg, S.A., Markus, H.R., Oyserman, D. and Stone, J.M. "Of Warrior Chiefs and Indian Princesses: The Psychological Consequences of American Indian Mascots." *Basic and Applied Social Psychology* 30.3 (2008): 208-218.

Steinfeldt, J.A., Foltz, B.D., Kaladow, J.K., Carlson, T.N., Pagano, L.A. Jr., Benton, E. and Steinfeldt, M.C. "Racism in the Electronic Age: Role of Online Forums in Expressing Racial Attitudes About American Indians." *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 16.3 (2010): 362-371.

Kim-Prieto, C., Ozakaki, S., Goldstein, L.A. and Kirschner, B. "Effect of Exposure to an American Indian Mascot on the Tendency to Stereotype a Different Minority Group." *Journal of Applied Psychology* 40.3 (2010): 534-553.