

RE: Oppose SB 215

Dear Oregon State Representatives:

I am writing today in opposition to Senate Bill 215. As a Native mother who is trying to raise two young Native boys in a predominately White town, as a teacher who is trying to educate Native youth, and as a Native woman who is trying to navigate a world that doesn't always represent me the way I would represent myself, I urge you to oppose Senate Bill 215. As a young woman who wasn't always sure of my cultural identity, I can attest to the ways Native mascots were harmful to my own self-image and identity. These mascots instilled in me a static and historicized image of Native Americans that I couldn't live up to. I degraded myself for not being able to fit this imaginary ideal, yet I tried. These mascots told me at a young age that being Indian meant little more than wearing feathers. I didn't have the words back then to name it, but now I see that they also objectified us as a people. Rather than complex, dynamic human beings, we were/still are reduced to caricatures. Moreover, they homogenize our cultures, reducing the diversity of Native America to a one-dimensional image. Finally, I see that they were detrimental to my friends and schoolmates who thought that a connection with these mascots meant that they "knew" about Native America. Promoting caricatures and stereotypes of a people hurts not only those being reduced to those stereotypes, but also the people who hold them. The rest of the world, thinking they know us, misses out on the diversity and beauty of our cultures.

As an individual that is supportive of Indian People, the preservation of the rights they reserved through treaties, their civil rights, human rights and rights as citizens of the United States I am asking that you also respect these rights and uphold the Administrative Rule banning the use of race-based Native American names and images in Oregon Schools.

- 1) The continued use of Race-based Native American names and images may be a violation of the civil rights of American Indian people.  
<https://www.michigan.gov/mdcr/0,4613,7-138--294605--,00.html>
- 2) Research has shown that the continued use of Race-based mascots, names, symbols, images, and personalities has a negative effect on not only American Indians students but all students by:
  - a. Undermining the educational experiences of members of all communities-especially those who have had little or no contact with Indigenous peoples. The symbols, images and mascots teach non-Indian children that it's acceptable to participate in culturally abusive behavior and perpetuate inaccurate misconceptions about American Indian culture.
  - b. Establishes an unwelcome and often times hostile learning environment for American Indians students that affirms

negative images/stereotypes that are promoted in mainstream society.

3) Native Students in the Classroom have Individual Civil Rights. According to the Oregon Department of Education, there are over 9,500 American Indian Alaska Native Students in Oregon Schools. They represent over 150 Tribes across the country, and they attend schools across the State. Native American students subject to race-based sports names experience **Educational Civil Rights Violations**, regardless of their tribal citizenship or location. **These violations will still occur if Tribes “negotiate” with districts, and will leave all American Indian Alaskan Native Students vulnerable.**

4) The National Congress of American Indians, founded in 1944, is the oldest, largest and most representative American Indian and Alaska Native organization serving Tribes. NCAI summarized their position stating, *“In recent years, the NCAI, with the unanimous support of its member tribes, has adopted three resolutions calling for an end to the remaining use of disparaging American Indian nicknames and imagery...”* *“[T]he use of Native American mascots, logos and symbols depicting American Indian people are offensive to us, and such depictions are inaccurate, unauthentic representations of the rich diversity and complex history of the more than 560 Indian Tribes in the United States and perpetuate cultural and racial stereotypes[.]”* *The resolution further identifies the insidious manner in which the use of these names and images affect even how Native Americans see themselves: “[S]ports teams with ‘Indian logos’ influence the images we see, the clothing we wear, and the standards we set, thereby encouraging us to tolerate racism.”*  
[www.ncai.org](http://www.ncai.org)

Please support the protection of Oregon students and provide socially and psychologically safe learning environments for **all students** free of objectification, stereotypes that are damaging. **VOTE no on SB 215!**

Thank You,

Leilani Sabzalian  
Doctoral Candidate, University of Oregon  
Title VII Youth Group Leader  
Springfield, OR