



**Testimony of Becky Straus, Legislative Director  
In Opposition to SB 215A  
House Committee on Education  
May 29, 2013**

Chair Gelser and Members of the Committee:

I apologize that I have a committee conflict this afternoon and appreciate your willingness to read and consider this written testimony. SB 215A would essentially reverse a 2012 move by the State Board of Education to ban Indian mascots, imagery and logos in Oregon's public schools. At the time, the ACLU of Oregon supported the ban and we encourage you today to refrain from moving forward with SB 215A.

Stereotyping by our public institutions is damaging to all of our communities.

Because public schools are often the leading institutions in local communities, and because local public schools establish community norms for their students, who are the leaders of tomorrow, school mascots based on stereotypes are especially damaging.

The ACLU understands that there is a long tradition and history of particular schools having Indian mascots, and that these traditions and history have been cited as justification for continuing to permit this practice. We respectfully ask you to consider that many practices we now recognize as repugnant were once justified on the basis of tradition. A few examples are slavery, lynching and school segregation.

The historical mistreatment of Native Americans in Oregon should not be a cause for pride. In the 19th century, our government actively participated in the forced relocation and extermination of thousands of Native Americans. In the 20th century, many of the remaining tribes were terminated and there was a conscious effort to extinguish Native American cultural traditions and practices by forcing Native American children to leave their homes and attend boarding schools designed to help them "assimilate" into the majority culture.

Thankfully, most Oregonians now recognize that these practices, although they are a significant part of Oregon history, are blemishes on that history and should not be held up as positive examples for our youth today. And yet, that is one of the inevitable effects of allowing stereotypical views of Native Americans to flourish in some communities.

There are many other opportunities for public schools to do outreach and include members of the Native American community in curriculum and public acknowledgement without having mascots that are so closely connected to the oppression of native people in Oregon.

We request that you refrain from moving forward with SB 215A. Thank you.