

L.D. 944

An Act to Ban Native American Mascots in All Public Schools

To: The Joint Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

From: Barry Dana, Former Penobscot Nation Tribal Chief/Cultural Traditions Keeper and Tribal Elder

I stand here before this committee in support of L.D. 944, a bill to forever ban here in Maine all future uses of my people as mascots, along with their associated nicknames and imagery.

As a Penobscot tribal Chief/elder, father and grandfather, I accept the roles and responsibilities associated with such titles. I stand to protect native people and native youth from the harmful depictions of our people when being used as mascots. Maine needs to lead the nation in this effort.

We can do this beginning in this chamber with your vote to pass this bill.

This has been a long road, to remove offensive mascots here in Maine, but its finally been 100% achieved with the recent vote by SAD 54 school board to discontinue their use of INDIANS as a sports team nickname. I applaud all Maine schools for honoring our request. However, since there is currently no actual law prohibiting such use of native people as mascots there is nothing preventing any school from naming or renaming their school any of the offensive names that have already been discontinued, names like Red Skins and Indians, and imagery like the stereotypical warrior. Schools that retained the name WARRIOR did remove all imagery that pertained to Native American type warriors upon mine and other Wabanaki's request. Removing offensive mascots/nicknames and imagery was done out of integrity and an admission that such acts were harmful. I applaud Mainers for such acts of honoring native people. Thank you Maine.

The most important message I can give here today is to enlighten us all about how these images, nicknames, and mascot make native people feel. I will define here for the purposes of the bill my use of the term native people. Native people are those of us who are closely related to a tribal government, a native community, and are affiliated with other recognized tribes of the United States and here in Maine.

I speak on behalf of Wabanaki people of Maine, who through their representative governments have officially requested the removal of offensive nicknames/mascots and imagery. I say offensive mascots/offensive nicknames and offensive imagery are harmful. Let me now sight others who say the same. Links, I believe have been provided to you by others.

Maine's Dept. of Education reports, "Because our schools must provide safe, inclusive, and respectful learning environments, and because schools teach many lessons by example, the Dept. urges schools to refrain from using mascots and logo, (and I add that offensive nicknames serve the same purpose), that depict Native American tribes, individuals, customs, and traditions. The department also sights the

American Psychological Association's report. This report states, "Stereotypical representations undermine the ability of native people to accurately portray themselves and showed a consistant negative reaction that lowers the self esteem of native youth." Would you all here be okay with schools allowing harmful behavior that lowered student's self esteem?

And, not just here in Maine but the U.S. Department of Education's White House Initiative on American Indian Education in a report found testimonies of Native youth illustrated how stereotypical imagery

and symbolism harm all students, more so native students by interfering with self identity, perpetuating negative stereotypes, encouraging bullying and teasing, creating an unhealthy learning environment.

Many tribes all over the U.S. have issued formal resolutions urging the removal of Native mascots; remember, INDIANS as nicknames serve the same purpose.

Here in Maine the four Wabanaki tribal governments have also issued resolutions calling for the disuse of Indians as mascots, nicknames and imagery. The National Congress of American Indian, representing all 580 plus federally recognized tribes of the U.S., established in 1944, the oldest and largest national organization of American Indians states, "We the members of NCAI urge all schools which use native sports stereotypes to change names, logos, mascots and behaviors to those that do not violate the human and civil rights of Native people."

All schools here in Maine had heard our pleas for change and have acting through their systems have dropped offensive mascots, nicknames and imagery. Out of the over 30 schools in Maine to honorably make the requested change, only one school district contains residents who are attempting to reinstate the offensive use of the nickname INDIANS. This is why this law is so important. To prevent such offensive actions. This particular district SAD 54 has a group known as Skowhegan INDIAN pride. I believe they are here today to offer testimony for opposing the bill. If so, you may hear the SIP wants the name INDIANS back after their very own school board voted to end the use of the Indian's nickname. This group claims the name honors Indian people. I am not honored being used as a team mascot/nickname, and the excuse of honoring may not be all that accurate. I was contacted two years ago when this issue was hot in the news by a former resident of Skowhegan, who's parents were homecoming king and queen, dressed as Indians. He told me from what his parents said, it had nothing to do with honoring the Indians who once lived in Skowhegan, it was just for fun.

As a long time Indian myself I can tell you I am not honored being used as a sports team's nickname/mascot. I played football, basketball and ran track for the Old Town INDIANS. As a result I constantly witnessed acts of offensiveness against my people. I just learned to endure it and stay quiet, but the remarks hurt. I was honored however when later Old Town invited me in to share my thoughts on the mascot. I told them my story. They did the right thing and changed, without much ado. That honors me.

You may also hear from the opposition to this bill that the name INDIANS honors the heritage of the native people that once lived there thus, it is now their heritage. Its my heritage as a direct descendent of the people who did once live there. And why do they no longer live there? In 1724 they were massacred by the british army. Their scalps were then sold for bountry. Men, women and children. Genocide is the colonial settler's heritage.

The last move SIP made to validate their desire to hold tight to an offensive nickname was to enlist the services of NAGA, who is said to be a national native american group supporting Indians as mascots. This small group is not a national group, rather a few individuals paid by the washington redskins as a PR stunt. They represent no one.

You know in a way it feels odd to be asking the legislature to ban offensive nicknames when this is 2019, where no other race is used in such a disrespectful manner. No teams are named the Blacks, The Jews, because it's wrong to do so. We as a nation should have never used my people as mascots. But, pro teams do it so school teams follow suit. Its not right. This is a native issue. Natives should be the ones

deciding what's offensive and what is appropriate. No non natives should dictate to native people what honors us...its like shoving garlic down my throat and telling me I like the taste. I know if I like the taste, and as a native I know what honors us. Sorry, mascots and Indian nicknames honor no one. They are offensive.

So, on behalf of a healthy educational learning environment for all Maine students , please consider helping Maine eradicate all offensive mascots, nicknames and imagery and pass a law that bans their future use. Thank you.

p.s...Last but not least, lets remember that Governor Mills has also weighed in on this issue. I quote her letter to SAD 54, "The name Indians has become a source of pain and anguish. Changing your mascot does not change you as a people."