



Statement by - Melissa Harding Ferretti Chairwoman of the Herring Pond Wampanoag Tribe

As a Herring Pond Wampanoag mother, and grandmother, who was raised by an elder of my tribe and has lived in Plymouth (and surrounding towns) all my life, WE know well that there is little knowledge of the actual history and contemporary existence of tribal communities in the region. I know about the racism faced by my ancestors, my tribal community, and members of my family....and myself. The fact that racist ideas about Native peoples in Massachusetts are deeply ingrained, and are reflected in sports teams mascots, should not have to be explained in 2020 -- especially since Native activists and educators have worked so hard for so long to educate other Americans about this. But here we are again today, working to educate Euroamericans and government officials about the blatant and destructive racism of such images and sports teams' mascots. My hope is that the Massachusetts legislature will listen and learn -- and will finally do what is right and just.

Native peoples throughout the US have fought for decades to bring an end to "Indian" mascots.

First and foremost, such symbols and imagery are deeply offensive, racist, and harmful to the wellbeing of Indigenous peoples --and especially to our Native youth. They are also directly linked to colonialism and its justifications of violence and racism directed specifically at Indigenous peoples.

Just as the seal of the commonwealth of Massachusetts suggests that colonization of Native peoples in this region was inevitable and necessary, so too are sports team mascots part of the colonial project of erasing Native identities and silencing Native accounts of our own histories. But we have never been silent, and we continue resist colonialism and the forms of racism that are aimed at Native peoples.

Like tribal nations throughout the United States today, the Herring Pond Wampanoag Tribe still faces the destructive impacts of colonialism. And, along with other tribal nations in the US today, we are immensely proud of our history of resilience as a Native people who have retained our deep connection to specific history and homeland. There are no sports teams' mascots that do honor to our tribal identity and history, or to that of any other tribal identities and histories. Nor does the seal of the commonwealth urge Euroamericans to learn from Native peoples themselves about their own identities and their own tribal histories.....Instead, it is intended to justify colonization and its destructive impacts: there is no mistaking the meaning of the colonial sword pointed down at the Native man depicted in the seal.

Melissa (Harding) Ferretti

****I wish also to quote the acclaimed *Cheyenne-Muscogee activist Suzan Shown Harjo*, who has worked for decades to bring an end to mascots, and who was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2014. Harjo explains that mascots are:

"especially vile to Native parents, grandparents and extended families because of the harm these practices do to the self-esteem of Native youth. Low self-esteem factors prominently in suicides, and our teen suicide rate has been at or near the highest level in the United States for more than a century, so this is a matter of life and death for most Native Peoples. It also is the main reason so many of us devote time and energy to ridding sports of these dehumanizing, objectifying and belittling practices and behaviors."

****In addition, I would like to share something said by *Crystal Echo Hawk, who is Pawnee, and the Executive Director of the Native advocacy organization IllumiNative*. *Echo Hawk* states:

"The systemic erasure of Native Peoples from modern society has led to the fact that 78% of Americans know little to nothing about Native Americans, 72% rarely encounter information about Native Peoples, and 66% of Americans don't think Native Peoples face discrimination. The limited exposure Americans have to Native peoples is rife with harmful stereotypes and representations that includes those perpetuated by Native American sports mascots, team names and racist fan traditions." (full article with the quote is online at <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/offensive-to-native-americans-racist-mascots-have-no-place-in-sports-301003720.html>).