



## NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS

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Massachusetts Legislature

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Greetings President Spilka, Speaker DeLeo, Senator Comerford, Representative Elugardo, and Representative Gouveia:

We hope this finds you well.

On behalf of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), we are writing to express our position on S. 247/H. 443/S. 2593, "An Act Prohibiting the Use of Native American Mascots by Public Schools in the Commonwealth," specifically NCAI's recommendation that the Massachusetts Legislature pass the legislation *using the bill's original language* (as it appears at <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/191/SD937>).

NCAI is the oldest, largest, and most representative national organization representing tribal nations and peoples. It has been leading Indian Country's movement to eradicate offensive Native "themed" mascots from sports and popular culture for the past fifty years. A national congress of tribal nations, it has passed numerous consensus-based resolutions declaring Indian Country's unified opposition to these mascots, dating back more than 50 years. As a resolution passed by NCAI's membership in 2005 explains, "the use of 'Native American' sports mascots, logos, or symbols perpetuates stereotypes of American Indians that are very harmful. The 'warrior savage' myth has plagued this country's relationships with the Indian people, as it reinforces the racist view that Indians are uncivilized and uneducated and it has been used to justify policies of forced assimilation and destruction of Indian culture."

Consistent with – and in furtherance of – NCAI's resolutions on the subject, we recommend that the Massachusetts Legislature restore the original language in the aforementioned bill and then pass the legislation so that it can be signed into law. We concur with the assessment of the Massachusetts Mascot Coalition and the Massachusetts Indigenous Legislative Agenda that the bill language as modified by the Joint Committee unnecessarily and severely weakens the strength and intent of the bill in the following ways:

- Erasing language specifying Native Americans avoids acknowledgement of racism directed towards them as a public health crisis.
- The word "denigrates" will cause confusion by being too subjective (especially since many non-Native people believe that these mascots "honor" Native Americans, which is certainly not the case), and

- The phrase “any racial, ethnic, gender, or religious group” is overly broad and contradicts the purpose and name of the bill, which is focused specifically on Native American mascots.

Indian Country’s longstanding position on this issue has been made abundantly clear for decades – we are not mascots, and we will not tolerate being treated as such. We thank you for your leadership on this issue, and we look forward to being a resource for the Massachusetts Legislature as it restores this legislation and moves it across the finish line.

In closing, please find below some key related resources that will be useful to you as you work to understand this issue and how Native “themed” mascots harm Native people – in particular Native youth.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Fawn Sharp  
President  
National Congress of American Indians



Kevin J. Allis  
CEO  
National Congress of American Indians

**Related Resources:**

[NCAI Statement on Washington Football Team's Retirement of Racist Mascot](#)

[NCAI’s “Ending the Legacy of Racism” Report](#)

[Washington Post: NCAI President Op-ed: Ridding Football of Racial Slurs](#)

[NCAI Applauds Decision by Little League International to Ban Racially Offensive Team Names and Mascots](#)

[Cleveland Indians manager says it’s time to change the team name](#)

[National Education Association Resolution: Supporting Removal of Native Themed Mascots](#)

[National Indian Education Association Resolution: Elimination of Race-Based Indian Logos, Mascots, and Names](#)

[American Psychological Association Resolution - Retiring American Indian Mascots](#)

[Study finds only harmful effects from Native themed mascots](#)

[Leading National Civil Rights and Racial Justice Organizations Announce Joint Opposition to Washington NFL Team Locating New Stadium in District of Columbia](#)

[CNN: Maine to become first state to ban Native American mascots in public schools](#)

[NCAI: Ending the Era of Harmful “Indian” Mascots](#)

[NCAI 2013 Resolution: Commending Efforts to Eliminate Racist Stereotypes in Sports and Calling on the U.S. President and Congress to Combat These Continuing Affronts to Native Peoples](#)

[NCAI 2005 Resolution: Support for NCAA Ban on “Indian” Mascots](#)

[Op-ed: The destructive dynamic of dehumanizing Native Americans](#)

[Why Educators Can’t Ignore Indian Mascots](#)