

Overview

This bill would prohibit the use of Native American mascots in Massachusetts public schools. About 38 schools in the Commonwealth currently use such mascots. As proposed, the legislation includes the following mandate: “The board of elementary and secondary education shall promulgate regulations to ensure that no public school uses an athletic team name, logo, or mascot which names, refers to, represents, or is associated with Native Americans, including aspects of Native American cultures and specific Native American tribes. The board shall establish a date by which any school in violation of said regulations shall choose a new team name, logo, or mascot.” Sen. Joanne Comerford, Democrat for Hampshire, Franklin and Worcester is Senate sponsor. House sponsors are Rep. Tami Gouveia for 14th Middlesex District and Rep. Nika Elugardo for 15th Suffolk District.

Harm to Native American Students

Decades of social science research have shown that Native American mascots have serious psychological, social, and cultural consequences for Native Americans. As stereotypes, mascots do not accurately represent Native Americans, nor do they honor them. Mascots reinforce one-dimensional, often derogatory stereotypes that overshadow the contributions, perspectives and struggles of contemporary Native American people. For many Native Americans, these racial stereotypes are painful reminders of historical trauma and of the limited ways that others see them. Native American youth are particularly vulnerable to the dehumanizing effects of these mascots. Exposure has been shown to cause lowered self-esteem, less future aspiration, and anxiety.

Harm to Non-Native Students

Studies have shown that when non-Native people are exposed to Native American mascots, this triggers negative and stereotypical views of racial minorities. While Native American students experience a negative impact on their self-esteem, White students experience a self-esteem boost from Native American mascots. In addition, these mascots normalize culturally insensitive behaviors and teach an inaccurate understanding of Native American people. These problems are compounded by insufficient curricula at all grade levels on the histories and contemporary lives of Native peoples (including colonial and U.S. policies of removal and extermination) that would give students a more accurate frame of reference with which to view these mascots and other Native American stereotypes.

Civil Rights

Native American mascots may violate anti-discrimination laws because they “establish an unwelcome and often hostile learning environment for American Indian students.” (American Psychological Association Resolution, 2005) “It is particularly disturbing that Native American references are still to be found in educational institutions, whether elementary, secondary or post-secondary. Schools are places where diverse groups of people come together to learn not only the ‘Three Rs,’ but also how to interact respectfully with people from different cultures. The use of stereotypical images of Native Americans by educational institutions has the potential to create a racially hostile educational environment that may be intimidating to Indian students. American Indians have the lowest high school graduation rates in the nation...The perpetuation of harmful

stereotypes may exacerbate these problems.” (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2001)

Statewide Issue

According to the 2010 census, there are more than 50,000 Native American people living in Massachusetts, many of whom attend Massachusetts public schools. Native American mascots are a violation of state and federal anti-discrimination laws, including the Massachusetts Anti-Bullying Law. Often school districts fear community backlash and so fail to fulfill their legal responsibility to protect all students from this discrimination. Civil rights issues should never be decided in the court of public opinion. Municipalities must not be allowed to violate civil rights laws because of community resistance to change.

Inclusive Process for Drafting Final Language of Bill

Many tribal representatives, Native American individuals residing in the Commonwealth, and organizations that work with and advocate for Native Americans have provided feedback on the language in the proposed bill. Representatives from Native American tribes and organizations must be involved in the process of drafting the final language of the bill to ensure that it addresses their needs and concerns.

Advocacy

The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), the country’s largest Native American advocacy group, has been fighting to end racist mascotry since the 1960s. Currently over 115 tribal, government, education, professional, civil rights, and religious organizations in the United States have recognized the negative health impacts of Native American mascots and called for elimination or restrictions on Native American mascots. In Massachusetts, this includes the Chappaquiddick Tribe of the Wampanoag Nation, Herring Pond Wampanoag Tribe, Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe, and Nipmuc Nation. Organizations in Massachusetts include Cultural Survival, Massachusetts Center for Native American Awareness, Massachusetts Commission on Indian Affairs, Massachusetts Teachers Association, North American Indian Center of Boston, and United American Indians of New England. In addition to NCAI, national organizations include the National Education Association, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, the American Psychological Association, American Anthropological Association, and the National Collegiate Athletic Association.

State Measures to Ban Mascots

- There are laws that prohibit (in various ways) Native American mascots in the public schools in the states of Oregon, California, and Wisconsin.
- State Boards of Education with resolutions against Native American mascots are: Minnesota, 1988; Washington, 1993 (reaffirmed in 2012); New York, 2001; New Hampshire, 2002; Michigan, 2003 (reaffirmed in 2010).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

<https://malegislature.gov/Bills/191/SD937>

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