

May 19, 2015

Re: Banning “Indian” mascots in Oregon Public Schools,

To: Samuel Henry, Miranda Summer, Charles R. Martinez, Jr., Jerome Colonna, Angela Bowen and Anthony Veliz

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen of the Oregon State Board of Education,

I have participated in and followed the work to ban “Indian” mascots in Oregon Public Schools since early 2012 (see attached testimony from the April 2012 hearing). I live in the Molalla River School District and am not a Native American. I realized early in 2012 that Molalla’s “Indian” mascot was an offensive racist stereotype and I was very heartened when the State Board in 2012 wisely voted to ban the use of these mascots. That 2012 hearing process was fair and comprehensive; the ban was based on very sound professional input about the harm these mascot stereotypes do in our society.

I highly admire the comments made by Board Member Angela Bowen and other Board Members during the March Board meeting. While I was not privileged to attend the recent work sessions that attempted to build consensus about how to find an “acceptable level of racism” via the bill you were asked to implement, I understand that no consensus was reached. That outcome would have been clear to anyone following the ongoing and heated national debate about “Indian mascots”. The Legislature made a huge mistake when it voted to weaken the ban.

When the Legislature was asked to reverse or weaken the ban, I participated in committee hearings. I was dismayed at the lack of knowledge that most of the Legislative committee members had about the issues and the history of the need for the ban. I was further dismayed when a Grand Ronde Tribal Council member, the very Tribe that would have jurisdiction over my Molalla River School District’s mascot, testified that bullying and prejudice are usual in schools and kids just need to get over it. I was appalled at that comment, since Molalla had two publicized noose threatening incidents in 2012 and has a quickly growing Latino student population. We must be working as a State to increase respect for diversity and never accept prejudice and bullying as “usual”.

Since the 2012 hearings, more research has proven that not only Native American children suffer from facing “Indian” mascots, but that all students suffer because race based mascots teach that it is permissible to stereotype races of people. American society is suffering from violence and prejudice that, in my opinion, often stems from racial stereotypes. We must do everything in our power to keep schools free from racial stereotypes – any attempt to allow a single Tribe to approve a race based mascot is simply an attempt to try to find an acceptable level of racism in our schools. That is not acceptable.

To continue to understand the issues, I have attended roundtables and lectures about the mascots over the last three years, I subscribe to news feeds on Native American issues. I

recognize there is no one “Indian” culture or generic “Indian”, that each Tribe or Band has different views about cultural appropriation and that there are many Native Americans who are not affiliated with any formal Tribal Council. How can we allow a single Tribe to speak for all those diverse indigenous cultures and individual voices?

In spite of the ongoing national controversy, the largely white community of Molalla clings to their “Indian” mascot and has acted in offensive and defiant ways since the ban. An alumni group hosted a “Once an Indian, Always an Indian” reunion, playing “Indian” with the “Indian” mascot outlined on an orange frosted cake and entering a restaurant through a teepee. The District just re-painted the stadium with the “Indian” mascot and name prominently displayed. The fall high school “welcome” assembly I attended still featured a white teacher reading a fake “Indian” poem and many teachers wore the “Indian” image on orange sweatshirts. A prominent downtown empty storefront had a big “GO INDIANS” display in the window, with pictures of team members. The local paper has still has endless stories about the “Indians” beating/losing/trouncing other teams. The Native Studies teacher prefaced his course outline by saying “We must learn about the people who once lived in what we call the wilderness”.

I would have expected that, out of respect, my District would have at least dimmed down the mascot use, would have begun to recognize that Native Americans are a vital part of contemporary society and would have begun to teach that the highly developed diverse cultures in pre-settlement America were not functioning in a “wilderness”. Since that has not happened, how could we ever expect any Districts with “Indian” mascots to use them respectfully? Mascots are not suited to being “respected” – they are silly, one-dimensional cartoon lucky charms used for entertainment.

In short, I do not see that any new respect is being shown in my District. All I see from the Molalla River School District Board is fretting about making deals with the Grand Ronde Tribe to keep a racist symbol. Promoting and protecting a racist stereotype is not acceptable to me as a taxpayer who is expected to fund local schools! I expect my public schools to evolve with the times by realizing that what might have been acceptable in the past is no longer acceptable in 21<sup>st</sup> century America.

Please follow what you know is best for the success of ALL the deserving students of Oregon and protect them from institutionalized racism. Do not allow one Tribe to speak for the 566 recognized Tribes and all the unaffiliated Native American voices. I support a postponement of a decision on this issue. I hope you will seek to reverse this unworkable and ill-conceived bill by educating the Oregon Legislature that it is impossible for you to sink to endorsing any level of racism in our schools.

Sincerely,

Susan Hansen

Molalla, Oregon

**April 27, 2012**

Dear Oregon State Board of Education,

I am in favor of banning Indian mascots in Oregon public schools.

I am heartsick, given the facts and the long opportunity for schools to make voluntary changes, that we are here today debating this issue. I am very upset that my taxes go to support an education system that has failed to respect the civil rights of Native Americans. It is hurtful that we would allow Native Americans to be turned into objects, per the definition of mascot, that represent lucky charms often used to market and advertise products. What a hurtful message that sends.

I have reviewed the reports filed by a myriad of educational and psychological experts. The Civil Rights Commission called for an end to "Indian" mascots in 1991 noting that mascots are "particularly inappropriate and insensitive in light of the long history of forced assimilation that American Indian people have endured in this country." I hope every member of this Board has taken the time to carefully read those compelling professional and legal documents? Those reports all say that Native American mascots are harmful to the Native American students, that they are racist and sexist. These mascots trap Native Americans in the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. They are all male images and generally represent warriors. They are historically inaccurate. They reduce a proud culture and a race of people to cartoon stereotypes. They fail to honor Native Americans for their current high contributions as contemporary Americans.

I live in the Molalla River School District where Che Butler's family was subjected to that horrible mascot display. I was inspired by Mr. Butler's powerpoint. I called Molalla High School Principal Randy Dalton two weeks ago to find out what changes had been made by Molalla. Dalton said he believed the mascot would have to go but had done nothing to help the students and their parents understand the issues. No attempts have been made to use curriculum that the Grand Ronde Tribes have told me they have available to teach the true history of their Tribes.

Superintendent Wayne Kostur told me that all new uniforms were supposed to have had "Indian" removed but that some basketball shorts had "just slipped through". Kostur also indicated that the auditorium floor, which features a large image of the Indian mascot with the war bonnet, would soon need to be refinished and that it would be easy to sand out the image.

Obviously, both the High School Principal and the Superintendent of Molalla Schools realize there is a need for change. Yet, the Superintendent and the Molalla School Board have completely failed to inform the community about the civil rights issues connected to the cartoon Indian mascot. So we now have the angry community blowback about saving the war bonnet Plains Indian mascot. Why wasn't education about needed mascot change mandated back when this issue first came up in 2006?

I checked the local newspaper archives to see what the paper had been printing. In the past year headlines had phrases including:

Hammer Molalla Indians  
Can't hide Indian pride  
Indians skid  
Indians conquer  
Indians crush  
Indians run over  
Indians claw  
Indians kept digging  
Molalla Indians pounded  
Indians execution was sloppy, their energy was lacking  
Indians fall to Indians  
1234 Indians add one more

To add more insult, the word Indian has been morphed into Indianettes for the school's dance team.

The Molalla Indians boys' soccer schedule appeared in the paper with an image of a giant arrow shaft. The complete sports schedule prominently featured the Indian in a war bonnet mascot in color.

The High School auditorium has the large Indian wearing a war bonnet on the floor. How can it be right for students to run over, drip sweat on, and dribble balls on top of that image of the Indian the school is supposedly honoring?

The MRSD had a hazing case a few years ago and 5 students went to jail for sexual abuse of another athlete. A MRSD high school teacher is currently awaiting trial for allegedly sexually abusing a student. We have anti-bullying campaigns; we have serious behavior problems in schools, so how can we ignore this important civil rights issue which could add to problems? If schools couldn't follow the gentle ask to have changed these racist mascots by now, we certainly can't trust them to do it voluntarily. The Board should demand immediate compliance – these schools already had over 5 years to change.

Small towns should not be teaching the children that these race based mascots are acceptable, only to have the children grow up and go out into the greater world and learn it wasn't acceptable. Aren't the small towns actually limiting their futures and their children's' future's by presenting and trying to protect this kind of disrespect of Native Americans, when most places and institutions have abandoned race based mascots?

I reject any cost factor as a reason for ending Native American mascots. The same false arguments are made every time civil rights issues arise, including access for handicapped. The cost of compliance has no bearing in civil rights. I would imagine failing to implement a ban will leave the schools and the State Board highly vulnerable to civil rights law suits which could be far more costly than producing new mascots.

I count among my most inspiring and touching learning experiences the stories and factual historical accounts the members of the Grand Ronde Tribes presented in recent years in Oregon City. The Molalla area was used for thousands of years by amazing people, who tended the wild, lived sustainably and loved mother earth. Their offspring, who are our fellow Oregonians today, aren't honored by being objectified as lucky charms for children. They aren't honored as contemporary Americans because their civil rights are being violated. We need to truly honor our Native American fellow Oregonians by immediately abandoning all race based mascots in Oregon.

Thank you for considering my concerns.

Sincerely,  
Susan Hansen  
PO Box 50  
Molalla Oregon 97038