



Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians

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The Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indian's (Siletz Tribe) Comment to the State Board of Education on Native American Mascots

The Siletz Tribe urges the Board of Education to adopt the proposed administrative rule to allow one of the nine federally recognized Indian tribes in Oregon to consent to the use of a school mascot that is significant to that Tribe as the Board is required to do under Senate Bill 1509. By doing so, the Board crafts a process that ensures citizens comply with the law and the Board fulfills their responsibility for adopting administrative rules under Section #2 of their own governing Policy and Procedure Manual.

The Siletz Tribe has carefully reviewed the handouts the Board prepared for today's meetings. These are the November 20, 2015 draft Oregon State Board of Education Resolution, the December 10, 2015 Board of Education's Administrative Rule Summary regarding Native American Mascots and the proposed administrative rule on Native American Mascots

The draft resolution speaks to the Board's desire to prevent culturally inaccurate images and portrayals of Native Americans and to be culturally sensitive. However, when the Siletz Tribe, tribal members, non-tribal members of the Siletz Community and the students who attend the Siletz Valley Charter School tell you that our Warrior name and mascot are a source of pride steeped in history of the Siletz Tribe and the recognition of all Veterans as warriors you chose to mischaracterize us as being well-meaning but offensive in our actions.

Your resolution points out that there is a widening achievement gap for Native Americans. Are you intending to lay the cause for this on Native American Mascots? Our Warrior mascot does not create a negative school environment, but poverty and inadequate funding most certainly do. If the Board is sincere about addressing this gap we invite the Board to turn your efforts towards helping our community get a state of the art school with adequate funding for administration, educators, equipment and other supportive materials.

The Board's administrative rule summary states that it is unknown whether any Native American Mascot can meet the requirements under the exception granted by the rule amendment of SB 1509 because the Board has not received any draft agreements. It is incredible that the Board would make this assertion knowing that Senate Bill 1509 states that any agreements must comply with rules adopted by the State Board of Education, which you clearly have not yet done. How can a Tribe and school district create an

agreement that complies with the rules when you haven't adopted them yet? The whole comment in your summary was apparently geared to not only support and justify your own inaction/failure to comply with legislative directives, but to take shots at our ability to decide for ourselves as a Tribal Community what is good for us, what supports us and what undermines our self-esteem and identity.

Both the Board's draft resolution and administrative rule summary make repeated references to the negative impacts of biased, derogatory or inflammatory mascots based on various studies and reports. While the Tribe can agree that there can be mascots that are derogatory and offensive, that is not how the Warrior Mascot is portrayed at the Siletz Valley Charter School. Recently the Tribe invited Dr. Noor, members of the Board of Education, members of our local school board and local state representatives to an event at the Siletz Valley Charter School to provide a first-hand experience of the annual Veteran's Pow Wow and the role of the Warrior Mascot. Only the members of our local school boards and state representatives attended. Dr. Noor, Anthony Veliz, and Lindsay Capps notified us of scheduling conflicts but the remaining four Board members did not respond. It is unfortunate none attended as Board members could have seen for themselves how the mascot impacts Siletz students and the community.

The Tribe has attempted in good faith to participate in the political process to retain our Warrior mascot. We followed the processes available to us and as the conversation evolved into SB 1509. We believed we had achieved an outcome that was both consistent with the Board's intent and ensured that our school mascot would continue as a symbol of cultural, community, school and individual pride.

The apparent steadfast resolve of the Board to maintain their original position on the matter despite evidence to the contrary is disturbing. The Board's refusal to consider the Siletz Tribe's perspective as valid and to instead dismiss us as misguided is paternalistic and offensive. The Board's obstructionist actions/inactions to avoid or delay the adoption of a rule are seen as a dereliction of duty. To ignore legislative directives, Tribal/State government to government relations protocols, and the feeling and well-being of our Native Students at Siletz Valley Schools compounds the issue.

Perhaps having the Siletz Tribe and its representatives testify repeatedly as another member of the public may have relegated the Tribe to a lesser status in the eyes of the Board of Education. The Siletz Tribe wants the Board to understand that the Tribe is not a member of the public; it is a sovereign, federally-recognized Indian tribe with which the State of Oregon has a formal government-to-government relationship. The Tribe expects the Board to treat the Siletz Tribe as such. By separate letter, the Tribe has requested that the Board of Education formally consult with the Siletz Tribe with regard to the proposed rule as required by SB 770, codified at ORS 182.164 and 182.166, and by Executive Order 96-30.

Next week, all of Oregon's nine tribes will convene in Canyonville, Oregon for the Annual Tribal Government to Government Summit. At this meeting Tribal and State of Oregon leaders and staff will review our progress in promoting positive government-to-government relationships. We have not experienced that through our involvement in the mascot issue. We believe that forthcoming consultation with the Board will help address this situation and look forward to meeting with the Board.