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September 23, 2016

Re: Statement on Native American Mascots

The misrepresentation of Native Americans has been an issue that the United States has struggled with for some time. Native American youth have a suicide rate 3 times that of their peers, and Native American high school-aged males have a suicide rate that is 8 times greater. Mascotting Native Americans in light of these statistics is reckless and endangers the most vulnerable population of young people in the country; and is done purely for entertainment purposes.

The Native American mascot establishes a hostile learning environment. The impact of stereotypes of any social identity of a group has been proven to cause mental health effects such as low self-esteem among Native Americans, and negative attitudes towards Native Americans amongst non-Native Americans. When non-Native students are shown stereotypical Native American sports images, they are more likely to endorse stereotypes about other minority groups. The practice of mascotting a people gives the community the license to act out on the ugly stereotype and causes them to perpetuate it in public much like the offensive "war whoop" and "tomahawk chop."

Imagine, for a moment what these negative stereotypes mascotting would cause for African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos. There is a reason no one wants to be mascotted. There is a reason no other ethnic group is mascotted to the degree that Native Americans are. It means having our culture misappropriated without our consent and to have it clowned. Mascotting another group of people without their permission isn't about love, respect, and honor but about privilege and power; the same privilege and power that discriminates against Native American people and our nations every single day.

There are 43 high schools in Massachusetts alone that still have Native American mascots. The schools can argue to keep their ethnic related mascot if they have the permission of the local Native American tribe; however, the Nipmuc Nation Tribal Council has unanimously voted that any and all sports mascot depicting Native people is directly tied to the history of genocide in this country against our people.

The use of ethnic-related sports team mascots, symbols, and nicknames has to stop.

THE NIPMUC NATION

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Love T. Richardson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Love T. Richardson
Council Member & Tribal Clerk
Nipmuc Nation Tribal Council