



Change the Mascot!

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Citing Civil Rights History, Groups Ask NFL Players to Oppose Washington NFL Team Name and Join the Change the Mascot Campaign

ONEIDA NATION HOMELANDS (NY) (May 27, 2014) The Oneida Indian Nation and the National Congress of American Indians announced today that leading Native American, civil rights and religious organizations have signed a letter that will be sent to every player in the NFL asking them to take a stand against the Washington NFL team's use of the derogatory R-word. Seventy-seven (77) groups, which collectively represent millions of Americans across the country, have cosigned the letters to the players.

The letter comes a week after 50 U.S. Senators sent a letter to NFL officials demanding a name change.

In addition to sending copies of its letter to the teams, the Change the Mascot Campaign will also be circulating the letter directly to NFL players via Twitter. The campaign will use the hashtag #rightsideofhistory.

“It is extremely heartening to see the widespread support from dozens of diverse organizations and thought leaders all coming together to demand a change for the team that represents our nation's capital,” said NCAI Executive Director Jackie Pata. “Today our eyes turn to the NFL players. By voicing statements of support and calling for change, they have an historic opportunity to oppose racism and end the league's endorsement of this denigrating term.”

Oneida Indian Nation Representative Ray Halbritter added: “Throughout history, athletes have played a pivotal role in courageously using their platforms to support civil rights crusades, and the NFL’s players are uniquely positioned to help finally stop the league from promoting this dictionary-defined racial slur. This slur, which was first made the name of the team by avowed segregationist George Preston Marshall, has no place in modern society, and medical studies have shown that it is having negative cultural, psychological and social effects on Native Americans. NFL players, many of whom are people of color, should not be forced by the league to promote this racial slur on their uniforms. The players have a First Amendment right to speak out against this continued injustice and to demand that Commissioner Roger Goodell and Washington owner Dan Snyder finally choose to stand on the right side of history.”

Seattle Seahawks Cornerback Richard Sherman, one of the league’s highest profile players, recently spoke out against the Washington team’s name. Other players have done the same, including Hall of Famer Art Monk and former Vikings safety Joey Browner.

In the letter to the players, the signatories cite the less-than-honorable history of the Washington team name. Debunking the NFL’s claim that its use of the word is intended to honor Native Americans, the letter notes Marshall’s role in originally branding the team with the slur. The letter also discusses the serious Native American psychological and public health issues that are exacerbated by the continued use and promotion of the term by the NFL, and calls upon the players as the most publicly identifiable representatives of the league to help end the injustice.

NCAI is the nation’s oldest, largest and most representative American Indian and Alaska Native organization serving the broad interests of tribal governments and communities. The group has played a key role in opposing the Washington team’s continued use of the R-word racial epithet.

Since the launch of the Change the Mascot campaign last year, the derogatory name and mascot of Washington’s NFL team has become a prominent civil rights issue garnering support from top thought leaders across the country and internationally. Members of Congress from both sides of the aisle, city councils, top sports icons, religious groups, prominent journalists and even President Obama have all spoken out against the team’s continued use of the epithet. The text of the letters with its full list of signatories can be found on the [Change the Mascot website](#).

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