



# Change the Mascot!

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## **Change the Mascot Coalition Applauds California Assembly for Acting to Remove Offensive R-Word from Public Schools Statewide**

*Proposed legislation now headed to the full Assembly would make California the first state in the nation to eliminate the dictionary-defined racial slur as a mascot for all statewide public schools.*

**Oneida Nation Homelands (April 29, 2015)** Change the Mascot campaign leaders today praised the California Assembly for advancing landmark legislation to ban use of the derogatory R-word in all public schools across the state. California would be the first state in the country to pass statewide legislation restricting the use of the dictionary-defined racial slur.

Entitled The California Racial Mascots Act, this legislation would require all California schools to phase out the R-word from their athletic teams by January 1, 2019. It would also prohibit schools from buying or distributing any materials, including newspapers, programs or yearbooks, bearing the R-word. Introduced and authored by Assemblyman Luis Alejo, the legislation unanimously passed the Assembly Education Committee last month and advanced through the

Assembly Committee on Arts, Entertainment, Sports, Tourism and Internet Media yesterday. It will now move to the full Assembly, and if successful, on to the Senate.

“It’s time that we as a state take a stand against racial slurs used in our public schools,” said Alejo. “There is obviously a lack of respect when we allow teams to brand themselves with racial slurs. The R-word was once used to describe Native American scalps sold for bounty, and in today’s society it has become widely recognized as a racial slur.”

Change the Mascot leaders Jackie Pata, Executive Director of the National Congress of American Indians, and Oneida Nation Representative Ray Halbritter praised the latest news from California:

“We applaud California’s lawmakers for standing up for what is right and attempting to protect the civil rights of the state’s Native Americans. This legislation is a constructive step in the right direction and a shining example of what happens when leaders choose to stand on the right side of history. The actions of California’s political leaders stands in stark contrast to the actions of Washington NFL team, who in the face of all evidence that this term offends and demeans Native Americans, continues to defend and promote it for their own financial gain.”

Pata and Halbritter continued: “Our youth are the future, so seeing these positive changes being made in our schools is critical. On behalf of the Change the Mascot campaign, we extend our gratitude to the California Assembly for taking proactive steps to remove this harmful slur from the vernacular.”

At a hearing before the Assembly Education Committee, Dahkota Kicking Bear Brown, a Miwok Indian student and football player at a California school whose rival features an R-word mascot, spoke articulately of dreading those games. He recalled seeing his own friends chanting “Kill the Redskins! Send them on the Trail of Tears!” and even looking on as students pretended to burn at the stake a female student dressed as a Native American. “I will blame people for hearing the facts and then not caring enough to stop the harm,” testified Brown. “These mascots create a false sense of who we are and what our traditions consist of. They allow others to mock our culture and misappropriate our regalia, customs and religion.”

Across the country, school boards, administrators and students themselves are making the decision to give up this offensive term. Students at Cooperstown High School in New York voted to drop the R-word slur as their school’s nickname in 2013. They served as an inspiration to the Change the Mascot campaign and also led the way for many others who have taken steps to remove the R-word from their schools, including the Oklahoma City School Board, the Houston Independent School District, Lancaster Central School District Board in New York and Conrad Schools of Science in Delaware.

Cited during the discussion of the bill in California were various academic and scientific studies illustrating the harmful psychological impact that racist mascots have on Native American youth. According to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, the use of Native American images and names by non-Native schools “has the potential to create a racially hostile educational

environment.” The American Psychological Association has declared these mascots create “an unwelcoming and even hostile school environment” for Native American students.

Studies from the University of Arizona, Stanford University and the University of Michigan found that American Indian youth exposed to Native American mascots and stereotypical imagery reported a diminished sense of what they felt they could achieve academically. Social science research by respected clinical psychologist Dr. Michael Friedman also identifying the dictionary-defined racial slur as a clear instrument of bullying.

Change the Mascot is a grassroots campaign that works to educate the public about the damaging effects on Native Americans arising from the continued use of the R-word. This civil and human rights movement has helped reshape the debate surrounding the Washington team’s name and brought the issue to the forefront of social consciousness. Since its launch, Change the Mascot has garnered support from a diverse coalition of prominent advocates including elected officials from both parties, Native American tribes, sports icons, leading journalists and news publications, civil and human rights organizations and religious leaders.

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