



**Statement of the Nebraska Advisory Committee
to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Regarding the Use of Native
American Indian Mascots in Non-Native Public Schools**

July 10, 2019

Herein, the Nebraska Advisory Committee (NEAC) respectfully informs the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (Commission) about the continued use of Native American Indian symbols, names, and images as mascots in many public schools in Nebraska. On May 22, 2019, the Nebraska Senate State-Tribal Relations Committee introduced Nebraska Legislative Resolution 242, designating the Education Committee of the Legislature to conduct an interim study to examine the replacement of Native American mascots in Nebraska at nontribal schools.¹

A significant body of social science research, as well as reports from individuals and groups within the Native American community, indicates that such use by non-native schools is disrespectful, offensive, demeaning, harmful, unwelcomed, and discriminatory. Therefore, the Nebraska State Advisory Committee publicly denounces the use of Native American mascots and calls for the elimination of such use within Nebraska's non-Native public schools.

While NEAC deeply respects the rights of all Americans to freedom of expression under the First Amendment, and in no way would attempt to prescribe how people can express themselves, NEAC members believe that the use of Native American images and nicknames in non-Native public schools is inappropriate, insensitive, creates a hostile educational environment, is discriminatory, and should be avoided.

Over the years, hundreds of organizations, including the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (2001), have issued statements calling for the end on the use of Native mascots, logos, names, imagery, and performances in school settings. In 1991, and again in 2008, the Nebraska Commission on Indian Affairs, passed resolutions asking schools to cease the use of Native American Indian imagery, names, and mascots. Additionally, several entities in Nebraska, including the State Department of Education and the Nebraska School Activities Association, have issued guidance discouraging schools from using Native mascots. We feel it is appropriate to add the NEAC's statement to the list of groups advocating for the elimination of Native mascots in Nebraska's non-Native public schools.

¹ Nebraska Legislative Resolution 242, 106 Legislature, First Session (2019). Available at: <https://nebraskalegislature.gov/FloorDocs/106/PDF/Intro/LR242.pdf>

Since the civil rights movement of the 1960s, many overtly derogatory symbols and images offensive to African-Americans and other people of color have been eliminated. However, many schools, including approximately 30 in Nebraska, continue to use Native American nicknames and imagery. Since the 1970s, American Indian leaders and organizations have vigorously voiced their opposition to these mascots and team names because they mock and trivialize Native Americans, their religion, and their culture. Despite forceful and frequent calls to end their use on moral, legal and educational grounds, the use of Native American mascots persists. The NEAC finds that the continued use of Native mascots is without merit, is not supportable, undermines our commitment to providing educational spaces that are welcoming and of value to all students, and, thus, must cease.

The NEAC is troubled that Native American references are still found in educational institutions, whether elementary, secondary or post-secondary. The use of stereotypical images of Native Americans by educational institutions creates a racially hostile educational environment that is intimidating and detrimental to Indian students. While arguably unintended, the use of Native mascots creates an offensive and hostile environment, is discriminatory, and perpetuates the misrepresentation and misunderstanding of contemporary Native American culture, practices, and issues.

Based on the negative impacts occasioned by the use of Native mascots, and in acknowledgment that use of those Indian names and images is not supported by our Native American communities, and further recognizing that use of Native mascots is an affront to the dignity and civil rights of Native Americans, members of the Nebraska Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights hereby encourage, and commit to working with, educational leaders, legislators, and community leaders to eliminate Native American Indian nicknames, images, and logos as mascots in Nebraska's non-Native public schools.

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The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, established by the Civil Rights Act of 1957, is the only independent, bipartisan agency charged with advising the President and Congress on civil rights and reporting annually on federal civil rights enforcement. Our 51 state Advisory Committees offer a broad perspective on civil rights concerns at state and local levels. The Commission: in our 7th decade, a continuing legacy of influence in civil rights. For information about the Commission, please visit www.usccr.gov and follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).