



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pete Harckham

Harckham Introduces Bill to Foster Community Conversations on Racially Polarizing Mascots

PETE HARCKHAM July 14, 2020

| ISSUE: **SCHOOL MASCOTS, TEAM MASCOTS, ANTI-RACISM, RACIAL AND ETHNIC DISCRIMINATION**



Albany, NY – New York State Senator Pete Harckham introduced legislation today that will require school districts that are using logos, mascots and team names that are viewed as being racially polarizing to engage in community conversations and discussions in order to reach a shared consensus on the subject and a path forward.

The bill, S.8708, is in response to the number of communities across New York now questioning whether to do away with team names and mascots that Native Americans and others find offensive, and the growing acknowledgement of the harmful effects of racial stereotyping and portrayals embodied by certain mascots and team logos.

“Today, we can no longer simply dismiss the idea that school or team nicknames and mascots are innocuous and do not hurt or offend other people,” said Harckham. “The fact is, many mascots are grounded in, or borne from, a systemic racism that does not mesh with the democratic values we share and seek to protect. It’s time we hold honest, respectful conversations and public hearings aimed at understanding what’s wrong with these kinds of mascots and why they should be retired.”

In New York, there are over a hundred schools that have either a Native American or “Indian” mascot or team name. In 2001, New York’s education commissioner asked local school districts to end the use of Native American names, but he did not order them to do so, instead leaving the decision up to local authorities and community members. The recent protests and demonstrations for social justice have revived the push to do away with the racially-charged mascots though.

It was announced this week that the Katonah-Lewisboro school board had decided to replace John Jay High School’s retired mascot, the Indians, with a new mascot—the Wolves. Meanwhile, the storied National Football League franchise Washington Redskins has decided to change its team name as well, after 87 years.