

To: RSU/MSAD 54 School Board

From: Shirley Hager, on behalf of the Friends (Quaker) Committee on Maine Public Policy
January 8, 2019

Good evening. My name is Shirley Hager. I live in Chesterville, and tonight I am representing the Friends Committee on Maine Public Policy. Friends are also known as Quakers, and we represent Quakers throughout the state advocating for social justice. One primary focus is to do our part to improve the relationship between the State of Maine and our Wabanaki neighbors.

I speak to you tonight as parents, as teachers, as school board members responsible for our youth. I myself was a sixth-grade teacher. Even if you are not a parent or a teacher, you are an educator of youth--a role model--by virtue of your words and deeds in this community. What do we try to teach our young people, starting at home when they are toddlers, and then in preschool and kindergarten? Respect others; listen; ask permission; don't take what doesn't belong to you. These are rules we teach children about how to treat other people.

The Wabanaki are living, breathing, present-day people who are our neighbors. But a mascot is an abstraction, an oversimplified image. It doesn't tell you anything about a real person, or a whole people. And when we make a mascot out of "Indians"-- we also make them into an abstraction, a symbol, not real. We make it easy to relate to them as stereotypes. We give our children an inaccurate and outdated image, *and* one that can lead to the kinds of racist interpretations we see at sports events. The Wabanaki are asking us to stop.

I grew up in the segregated South in the 1950s and '60s. I have seen how it becomes possible for one group of people to ignore the desires, wishes, hopes and dreams of another group of people--by objectifying them, stereotyping them, even denying their personhood. Wabanaki people only ask that this school district treat them as we would treat any other person. To treat them as we would wish to be treated. In ignoring their request that they not be our mascot, we violate the rules we teach our own children.

On behalf of the Friends Committee on Maine Public Policy, I ask that you retire your current mascot and adopt one that honors all that you want this school district, this community, to be. One that, as Quakers would say, honors "that of God in *every person*." Thank you.