

January 3, 2019

RSU 54/MSAD #54 School District
Skowhegan Area Schools
Board of Directors and Superintendent Colbry
196 West Front Street
Skowhegan, ME 04976

Dear Chair Ring, Vice-Chair Charles, Superintendent Colbry, and Members of the SAD 54 School Board:

We, the undersigned faith leaders in the state of Maine, wish to add our voices to those of the Wabanaki peoples who have requested that you stop using the “Indian” name and logo for your school sports teams. At the core of many faith traditions is a simple guide for ethical decision-making — Love your neighbor as yourself. If our neighbors let us know that our actions are causing them pain or distress, we have a duty to listen, to understand, and to change our behavior for the greater good of our relationship to our neighbors.

We have heard you express that your original intention was to honor the Native history that took place in the Skowhegan area, and that the symbol was meant to denote courage and strength. But Wabanaki people have clearly stated that these symbols do not honor them. They have expressed to you the negative impact of such names and mascots on their people. As the National Congress of American Indians states, “rather than honoring Native peoples, these caricatures and stereotypes are harmful, perpetuate negative stereotypes of America’s first peoples, and contribute to a disregard for the personhood of Native peoples.” Studies show that using such mascots lowers the self-esteem of American Indian students, and teach all students that stereotyping is acceptable. The US Commission on Civil Rights, the American Psychological Association, and the National Education Association, among others, have all opposed Indian themed mascots.

We also draw inspiration from statements made by national faith organizations, for example, “the United Methodist Church has issued a call for repentance for the Church’s role in the dehumanization and colonization of our Native American sisters and brothers. In light of this stand and the fact that we strongly believe the continued use of Native American names as nicknames is demeaning and racist, ... we support efforts throughout our society to replace such nicknames, mascots, and symbols.” Similar statements have been issued by the United Church of Christ General Synod, the Unitarian Universalist Association, the American Jewish Committee, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the Religious Society of Friends, and by clergy from across the country.

If the actual impact of our choices does not match our original intentions, then the good choice would be to make a change that honors the impact on our neighbor. We understand that wrestling with such decisions can be challenging and painful for a community. We hold all of you in our prayers during this process, and hope that you will find the courage and strength to truly care for your Wabanaki neighbors here in Maine. We believe that by so doing, you will find your own community strengthened as well.

Sincerely,

Decolonizing Faith Project

Maine Council of Churches

Moral Movement Maine

Committee on Tribal State Relations
Friends (Quaker) Committee on Maine Public Policy

Maine Unitarian Universalist State Advocacy Network

Unitarian Universalist Community Church of Augusta

HopeGateWay (United Methodist Church), Portland

First Universalist Church of Auburn

Rev. Dr. Myke Johnson
Unitarian Universalist, Portland

Maggie Edmondson, pastor
Winthrop Center Friends Church (Quaker)

Rev. Carie Johnsen
Unitarian Universalist, Augusta

Rabbi Erica Asch
Jewish, Augusta

Rev. Allen Ewing-Merrill
United Methodist, Portland

Rabbi Joshua Chasan
Jewish, Portland

Rev. Dr. Anita Farber-Robertson
Unitarian Universalist, Cape Elizabeth

Rev. Dr. James Gertmenian
United Church of Christ, Cumberland Foreside

Rev. Dr. Marvin Ellison
Presbyterian Church (USA), Portland

Rev. Cindy Maddox
United Church of Christ, South Portland

Rev. Tamara Torres McGovern
United Church of Christ, Portland

Khenmo Drolma
Buddhist, Falmouth

Rev. Anne C. Fowler
Episcopal, Portland

Rev. Dr. Robert Grove-Markwood
United Church of Christ, Portland

Rev. Andrea Thompson McCall
United Church of Christ, South Portland

Rev. John B. McCall
United Church of Christ, South Portland

Rev. Jill Job Saxby
Unitarian Universalist, Cape Elizabeth

Rev. Dr. Judith Blanchard
United Church of Christ, Freeport

Lane Fisher, M.Div.
Unitarian Universalist, Belfast

Rev. Dr. Margaret Sheffield
United Methodist, Scarborough

Rev. Stephen Edington
Unitarian Universalist, Belfast

Rev. Jinwoo Chun
United Methodist, Belfast

Rev. Sara Hayman
Unitarian Universalist, Ellsworth

Rev. Kitsy Winthrop
Unitarian Universalist, Portland

Rev. Priscilla Dreyman
United Methodist, South Portland

Amy Fiorilli, Interim Minister
Unitarian Universalist, Otis

Rev. Stephen Carnahan
United Church of Christ, Auburn

Rev. Lara Campbell
Unitarian Universalist, Kennebunk

Rev. Margaret Beckman
Unitarian Universalist, Dedham

Rev. Charles J. Stephens
Unitarian Universalist, Blue Hill

Rabbi Darah Lerner
Jewish, Bangor

Rev. Jim Anderson
Reformed, Kennebunk

Rev. Dr. Rosemary Ananis
Old Catholic Church, Wells

Rabbi Jared H. Saks
Reform Judaism, Portland

Rev. Gary G. Pinder
Presbyterian Church (USA), Brooklin

Rev. Erika Hewitt
Unitarian Universalist, Bath

Rev. Christina Sillari
Unitarian Universalist, Portland

Rev. Paula Norbert
United Church of Christ, Kennebunk

Rev. Dr. Jodi Cohen Hayashida
Unitarian Universalist, Auburn

Rev. Jean Ashland
Buddhist, Belfast

Rev. Alyssa Lodewick
United Church of Christ, Portland

Rev. Brad Hirst
United Church of Christ, Kittery

Rev. Sara Bartlett
United Church of Christ, Auburn

Rev. Susan Burgess
United Church of Christ, Dexter

Rev. Andrew D'Angio White
Episcopal, Kennebunk

Rev. Sara Ewing-Merrill
United Methodist, Portland

Rev. Charlotte Hendee
United Methodist, Wells

Rev. Gary Nettleton
United Methodist, Wells

Molly Brewer, Ministerial Intern
Unitarian Universalist, Portland

Rev. Robert A. Moore
United Methodist, Wells

Rev. Deborah Shipp
United Methodist, Wells

Rev. Emily C. Goodnow
United Church of Christ, Bridgton

Rev. Frank Morin
Roman Catholic, Waterville

Rev. Shantia Wright-Gray
United Church of Christ, Old Orchard Beach

Rev. Lori Whittemore
Interfaith, Saco

Rev. Susie Maxwell
United Church of Christ, Whiting

Rev. Dr. Ruth Merriam
United Methodist, Brunswick

Rev. Donald J. Rudalevige
United Methodist, Cape Elizabeth

Rev. Dr. Susan E. Davies
United Church of Christ, Veazie

Rev. Dr. Larry R. Kalajainen
United Methodist / United Church of Christ,
Brunswick

Rev. Meg Queior
United Methodist, Montville

Pastor Norman Boulay
United Methodist, Kennebunk

Rev. Jonathan Wright-Gray
American Baptist, Old Orchard Beach

Rev. Mark Monson Alley
United Methodist, Wells

Rev. Dr. Nina Ranadive Pooley
Episcopal, Yarmouth

Rev. Jacquelyn Brannen
United Methodist, Bucksport

Pastor Mimi Mills
United Methodist, Kennebunk

Rev. Lorna Grenfell
Church of Universal Fellowship, Orono

Rev. Abby d'Ambruoso
Lutheran, Portland

Rev. Dr. Bruce Burnham
United Church of Christ, Old Town

Rev. Holly S. Morrison
United Church of Christ, Pownal

Rabbi Lisa Vinikoor
Jewish, Bath

Leslie Manning
Religious Society of Friends (Quaker), Bath

Rev. Dr. Emily Taylor
United Church of Christ, Orono

Rev. Theodore Kanellakis
Episcopal Maine Maine Committee on Indian
Relations, Camden

Bishop S. Clifton Ives
United Methodist, Portland

Rev. Grace Bartlett
United Church of Christ, Bangor

Rev. Darren L. Morgan
United Church of Christ, Glenburn

Rev. Linda Littlefield Grenfell
United Methodist, Wells

Rev. Dr. Vigrinia Peacock
Episcopal, Stonington

Rev. Dr. Thomas L. Blackstone
United Methodist, Waterville

Rev. Wendy Monson Alley, J.D.
United Methodist, Wells

Rev. Gwyneth Arrison
United Methodist, Bath

Jim Matlack, Clerk
Friends Committee on Maine Public Policy,
Camden

Rev. Lynn V. Rutledge
Episcopal, Pembroke

Diane Oltarzewski
Friends Committee on Maine Public Policy,
Belfast

Rev. Dalene Fuller Rogers
Earth-Centered Christian / Buddhist, Brunswick

Rev. Ted Poland
United Methodist, Ocean Park

Rev. Sally Poland
United Methodist, Ocean Park

Rev. Dr. Karen L. Munson
United Methodist, East Winthrop

Rev. Melissa Yosua-Davis
United Methodist, Chebeague Island

Pastor David Gardiner
Christian Non-Denominational, Hampden

Lynn Deeves, Chan Bieu Tu
Order of Interbeing – Club Village tradition,
Richmond

Rev. Rick McKinley
United Methodist, Hartland

Rev. Christina Cataldo
United Church of Christ, Winthrop

Marty Soule, Chân Quang Độ,
True Land of Light
Buddhist, Peaceful Heart Sangha, Augusta

Daniel DeLuca, True Manifestation of the Path
Order of Interbeing, Aurora

A. Theodate Lawlor, True Land of Joy
Buddhist, Plum Village Tradition, Orono

Peggy Smith, Chan Nguyet Sac
Buddhist, Lincolnville

Greg Fahy
Plum Village Tradition of Zen Buddhism,
Hallowell

Susannah Ristine,
True Manifestation of Diligence
Peaceful Harbor Sangha, South Portland