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March 6, 2026

The Honorable Jo Comerford  
Massachusetts State Senate  
State House, Room 410  
Boston, Massachusetts 02133

The Honorable Brandy Fluker-Reid  
Massachusetts House of Representatives  
State House, Room 136  
Boston, Massachusetts 02133

**Re: Support for S.312/H.575, An Act Prohibiting the Use of Native American Mascots by Public Schools in the Commonwealth**

Dear Senator Comerford and Representative Fluker-Reid:

On behalf of the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah), a federally recognized Indian Tribe located on Noepe, now called Martha's Vineyard, we write in strong support of S.312/H.575, An Act Prohibiting the Use of Native American Mascots by Public Schools in the Commonwealth. We commend you both for your leadership and commitment to Native peoples in drafting and championing this legislation. Your work reflects a deep understanding of the harms caused by the continued use of Native American imagery in our public schools, and the Tribe is grateful for your advocacy on this important issue. We urge the Legislature to pass S.312/H.575 without delay.

The Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah) is among the oldest and most historically significant Tribal nations in what is now the United States. Our people were the first Native nation to encounter English colonizers on this continent, greeting the Mayflower passengers at Plymouth in 1620 and entering into a treaty relationship that made the survival of that early colony possible. It was Wampanoag leaders, including Massasoit Ousamequin, who extended diplomacy and aid to those settlers, an act of generosity that is commemorated each year in the national holiday of Thanksgiving. Yet despite this foundational role in American history, the Wampanoag people have seen their culture, sovereignty, and very humanity diminished and distorted in the centuries since – including through the very kind of stereotyping and caricature that the use of Native American mascots in our schools perpetuates to this day. That the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, homeland of the Wampanoag, has not yet acted to end this practice is a matter of particular significance to our Tribe.



We are not mascots. We are not symbols. We are a sovereign people with a living culture, a government, and thousands of years of history on this land. The use of Native American imagery as athletic team names, logos, and mascots – however well-intentioned – reduces our peoples to caricatures and perpetuates harmful stereotypes with real and lasting consequences for Native youth and communities across the Commonwealth and the nation.

Research consistently demonstrates that the use of Native American mascots causes psychological harm to Native American students, undermining their sense of self-worth and belonging in educational environments. The American Psychological Association, the American Sociological Association, the National Education Association, and numerous other professional bodies have called for the retirement of such mascots. Massachusetts public schools should be places where every student, including Native students, can learn and thrive free from dehumanizing imagery.

Research equally affirms the corollary: when Native youth see Indigenous professionals, leaders, and community members reflected in positions of authority and respect, the effects on self-esteem, academic achievement, and cultural pride are profound and lasting. The Massachusetts Legislature has an opportunity to send that same message, that Native peoples are leaders, innovators, and rights-bearing citizens of this Commonwealth, by replacing harmful caricature with the dignity our communities deserve.

We commend the careful and workable framework established by S.312/H.575. The bill tasks the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education with identifying affected schools in collaboration with the Massachusetts Commission on Indian Affairs and requires each school to enter into a memorandum of understanding with DESE establishing an implementation timeline not to exceed three years. This measured approach respects local school communities while establishing a firm and enforceable deadline. The immediate prohibition on the adoption of any new Native American mascots upon passage is equally important, and we strongly support that provision.

We also note the bill's prudent interim measure prohibiting affected schools from purchasing or refurbishing uniforms, banners, scoreboards, and other materials bearing the offending name, logo, or mascot during the transition period. This common-sense safeguard prevents schools from deepening their investment in imagery they will ultimately be required to retire, and ensures that taxpayer dollars are not spent entrenching a practice the Legislature has determined to be harmful.

We are aware that some school communities will resist this change, citing tradition and local pride. We respectfully submit that no tradition built on the erasure and misrepresentation of another people's identity is worth preserving. Schools that have undergone this transition in other states have found it not only manageable, but an opportunity for meaningful community engagement and honest reflection on the region's true history – including the history of the Wampanoag people and other Native nations whose heritage should be taught with accuracy and respect, not reduced to a team nickname.

The Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah) stands ready to partner with the Legislature, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Commission on Indian Affairs, and individual school communities to support thoughtful implementation of this legislation. We are committed to working alongside educators to bring accurate, respectful, and meaningful Native history and culture into Massachusetts classrooms in a way that honors, rather than exploits, our living heritage.



We urge the full Legislature to act swiftly to advance S.312/H.575. The Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah) has waited long enough. The time for this change is now, and we are grateful to have champions in Senator Comerford and Representative Fluker-Reid who understand what is at stake.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kevin Devine".

Chairman Kevin Devine  
Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah)