



ASSOCIATION ON AMERICAN INDIAN AFFAIRS

Protecting Sovereignty • Preserving Culture
Educating Youth • Building Capacity

February 28, 2023

Via email only

Robert J. Jones, Chancellor
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
517 Swanlund Admin Building
601 E. John
M/C 304
Champaign, IL 61820-5711
chancellor@illinois.edu

Re: University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Mascot

Dear Chancellor Jones,

Greetings and well wishes to you! The Association on American Indian Affairs (the "Association"), is the oldest non-profit serving Indian Country protecting sovereignty, preserving culture, educating youth and building capacity. The Association was formed in 1922 to change the destructive path of federal policy from assimilation, termination and allotment, to sovereignty, self-determination and self-sufficiency. Throughout its 100-year history, the Association has provided national advocacy on watershed issues that support sovereignty and culture, while working on the ground at a grassroots level with Tribes to support the implementation of programs that affect real lives on the ground.

The Association is governed by an all-Native American Board of Directors from across Indian country. As a membership organization, the Association speaks with unified voices from all over the country, both Native and non-Native together, to protect sovereignty, preserve culture, educate youth and build capacity.

We condemn the use of racist Native sports team names, mascots, symbols and gestures. Using these derogatory and harmful stereotypes perpetuates a long history of racist depictions of Indigenous persons and violence, as well as undermines the educational learning environment. The normalization of dehumanizing Native Peoples directly contributes to the harmful objectification and homogenization of Native Americans. The evidence of the harm of systemic racism is demonstrated by the high disparities in rates of violence against Natives.

The [Race, Ethnicity and Education Journal](#) published a study on June 8, 2020, by Laurel R. Davis-Delano, PhD, of Springfield College; Joseph P. Gone, Aaniiih-Gros Ventre, PhD, Harvard University; and Stephanie A. Fryberg, Tulalip, PhD, University of Michigan. The study identified low self-esteem, low community worth, increased negative feelings of stress and depression as negative psychological effects Native American mascots wreak on the well-being of Native Americans, especially youth.

We understand that it has been more than a decade since the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign made an effort to formally replace its mascot. Retiring harmful imagery is commendable but not formally replacing that imagery allows for stereotypes to continue and fails to give the University community a new identity that is truly representative of them. We have been made aware of a mascot replacement proposal that has garnered significant support, including passing a campus-wide referendum and faculty vote. The Association is inspired by your community's efforts to address past harm and its dedication to finding a suitable replacement moving forward.

The Association is supportive of a replacement mascot for the University, and views such a selection as a positive step forward and an opportunity for the University to be part of healing past harms both in Indian Country and within the University community. The Association urges the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Board of Trustees, Chancellor, and Administration to prioritize this matter and take decisive action to formally replace and rebrand the University's mascot. Additionally, we recommend the University issue a formal apology for the lack of a timely response to this matter after more than a decade of no action and allowing ongoing harm and stereotypes to continue.

You may reach me directly at Colleen@Indian-Affairs.org or by telephone at 240-314-7155.

Wiingezin (*take care*),



Colleen Medicine
Program Director

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