



NATIONAL INDIAN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

March 15, 2023

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

Dear Chancellor Jones,

The National Indian Education Association (NIEA) has been working to advance comprehensive, culture-based educational opportunities for American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians since 1969. As a champion for Native educators and students, NIEA seeks to expose and remedy the harm inflicted by Native “themed” mascots, imagery, and branding on the identity of Native students.

NIEA joins with both Native and non-Native organizations to end the use of Native American names, logos, and mascots in the world of sports and beyond. NIEA supports the work done by the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign community to formally replace their mascot more than a decade after the harmful imagery was retired. Your work to find an inclusive and lasting representative for the school will be of benefit to Native students, as well as to the entire student body at the University of Illinois.

NIEA applauds your community’s attention to this matter. When harmful Native “themed” mascots are retired but not replaced, this imagery lingers within the community along with its impact on the attitudes of the school’s students, faculty, administration, and alumni. It is time for the University of Illinois to support a new identity that is truly representative of the values that define its mission to enhance the lives of citizens in Illinois, across the nation and around the world through our leadership in learning, discovery, engagement, and economic development.



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NIEA is aware that a mascot replacement proposal has garnered support within the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign community, including passing a campus-wide referendum and faculty vote. NIEA supports the process employed to select a replacement mascot for the university and understands this decision will produce an important change for your community. To this end, NIEA recommends that the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign administration, Chancellor, and Board of Trustees take prompt and decisive action to replace and rebrand the University's mascot.

As you work through this process, NIEA would like to offer its assistance as needed. As an education organization, we understand the unique role that educational institutions play in shaping the environment in which individuals are formed – both intellectually and socially. And as an organization that supports Native students, we also understand well how the mascot issue directly affects the lives of individuals and the well-being of communities. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you would like us to provide guidance as you make this important decision.

Sincerely,

Diana Cournoyer
Oglala Sioux Tribe
Executive Director