

[Native American Mascots Could Be Banned in Historic First](#)

By [Nick Mordowanec](#), Staff Writer, Newsweek

Massachusetts legislators are debating a pair of bills that would effectively ban Native American mascots and symbolism in public high schools.

State Senator Joanne Comerford and state Representative Brandy Fluker Oakley proposed the bills in February to [eliminate Native American high school mascots](#) statewide in addition to banning logos, mascots and team names that "denigrate...any racial, ethnic, gender, or religious group." It is the third such attempt to make the changing of mascots a statewide issue, dating to the 2019-2020 legislative session.

There has been a [renewed focus on Native American mascots](#) in recent years across many states and athletic organizations that encompass all ages, notably the [National Football League's](#) Washington Commanders and Major League Baseball's Cleveland Guardians. Washington's football team, which became the Commanders in 2022, had been the Redskins until 2020. The Guardians changed from Indians after the 2021 season.

In September, the [Washington NFL franchise was sued](#) on behalf of the Native American Guardians Association (NAGA) for what it claims has been a coordinated and willful effort by the team to defame NAGA. A Commanders spokesperson previously told *Newsweek* that the complaint is without merit and would be properly adjudicated.

Fluker Oakley said during a hearing Monday in the State House that Native American mascots and similar symbols can have pernicious psychological effects on indigenous children.

"Native American mascots reinforce negative stereotypes and generate a hostile climate for students," Fluker Oakley said, according to Boston public radio station WGBH. "Researchers have found that Native American mascots resulted in lower self-esteem, lower perceptions of...community worth and lower achievement."

Newsweek reached out to Fluker Oakley and Comerford via email for comment.

Others at the hearing made similar arguments, that the symbols are harmful, dehumanizing and racist. Activists in favor of such changes also expressed weariness, in terms of facing pushback from others who want to maintain the status quo.

"The remaining schools with Native mascots are stubbornly attached to controlling our Native identities, which they are using against our wishes," said Rhonda Anderson, the Western Massachusetts Commissioner on Indian Affairs. "Native Americans including myself have faced racial slurs, threats of violence and harassment from communities when we challenge the use of these mascots."

The New England Anti-Mascot Coalition (NEAMC), which advocates for the elimination of racial stereotypes in the form of sports mascots, nicknames and logos in high schools, colleges and universities, and in professional sports, says that 46 New England high schools use some sort of Native American moniker.

Massachusetts has 23 schools with such mascots, more than any other state in the region, and is followed by Connecticut with 10. Some schools in Massachusetts, like Grafton and Algonquin, have changed their mascots.

Others have not, including some in Central Massachusetts like Bartlett High School (Indians), Narragansett Regional High School (Warriors), Nipmuc Regional High School (Warriors) and Tantasqua Regional High School (Warriors), according to the *Worcester Telegram*.

In 2020, North Brookfield High School changed its mascot from the Indians to the Bobcats. However, community members later voted to change it back.

In western Massachusetts, Taconic High and Turner Falls High changed their school mascot, while Mohawk Trail Regional no longer uses a Native American in its logo, according to WWLP.

Last month, the Foxborough School Committee voted to get rid of its Native American mascot and symbolism, according to Boston.com. The committee decided to keep the name "Warriors."

"It's a racist way of looking at us indigenous people," Faries Gray, a member of the Massachusetts Tribe of the Ponkapoag, said on Monday, according to Spectrum 1 News. "This crop of racism, we cannot just wave a magic wand at and get rid of. We can't do that. We can take away pieces at a time.

"This is one of those pieces. This is a place where it has to happen. We can't continue to go to these schools."

Newsweek reached out to multiple Native American and indigenous groups via email for comment.

If voted into law, the state's Board of Elementary and Secondary Education will set a deadline for schools still using any Native American mascots or symbolism to adopt new names and iconography. During the process, schools would be allowed to temporarily continue using old uniforms and signs, etc.

Newsweek reached out to the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education via email for comment.

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