



**NEW BEDFORD BRANCH
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT
OF COLORED PEOPLE**

95 Cedar St. New Bedford, Massachusetts 02740 • 508-990-0746

—Chartered 1917— Historic Home of Frederick Douglass -Lewis Temple -Sgt. William H. Carney

March 26, 2021

Dr. Bonny L. Gifford
School Administration Building-Care of Superintendent's Office
8 Bush Street
Dartmouth, MA 02748

Re: Dartmouth School Committee Diversity Committee and Indian Mascot Discussion

Dear Dr. Gifford and members of the Dartmouth School Committee:

Members of the NAACP New Bedford Branch and the larger Dartmouth area community are frustrated and, frankly, dismayed by your School Committee's inaction on retiring the racist Dartmouth High School mascot. While, the Dartmouth School Committee (DSC) has been avoiding this issue, school districts throughout the Commonwealth have retired their "Indian" mascots. These include: Pentucket; Groveland; Merrimac; West Newbury; Athol; Barnstable Nashoba; Hanover; Winchester; Grafton; Brookfield; Taconic High; Braintree; Walpole; and Pittsfield.

In June, while opponents of racist mascots were gaining steam, Faries Gray, Sagamore (war chief) of the Massachusetts tribe, explained, "These mascots create such a negative environment for the indigenous [people], it is ridiculous that we even have to have a discussion about why this is a racist thing. That is not our culture. It is really disrespectful to us." Nevertheless, the Dartmouth Schools have consulted no Native leadership on this issue.

When Hanover Schools retired its "Indian," Libby Corbo, a member of Hanover's School Committee said, "My opinion as a white person as to whether the sacred symbol of Native American heritage is offensive or not frankly doesn't matter." She added, **"I think the days of the white majority telling minorities what is best for them or how they should feel... it needs to end today with our voice saying this is no longer acceptable in our community."**

Superintendent Justin Bartholomew, of the Pentucket School District said, "When the mascot first was selected it was done so out of respect for what they believed a 'Sachem' represented. We know today that there are myriad reasons why it is not appropriate to have a 'Sachem' mascot, and this is an opportunity for Pentucket to start a new chapter."

Racist mascots and stereotypes have been removed from such national brands as The Washington football team, Land O'Lakes, Aunt Jemima, and Uncle Ben's. Certainly, the D.C. Washington

football team has many supporters who were attached to the name “Redskins.” They felt, as many in Dartmouth do, that it was somehow part of their heritage. That may be, but it’s an ugly and offensive part of our collective heritage. With regard to the football team, the rebranding has not disrupted the team at all from fully participating in the NFL.

This issue won’t magically disappear. Indeed, as the School District fiddles, the community is burning with frustration. You have decided to hand off the issue to a yet-to-be-named "diversity committee" that will consider the mascot and an anti-racism resolution being voted on by the Massachusetts Association of School Committees, and to report back – at some unspecified date in the future. But even this token process now appears to be on hold.

We implore you to retire the mascot without delay. You are entrusted with the education and care of young people who are grappling with the legacy of racism and stereotypes every day. What do you suppose they are learning from this experience? Perhaps that combating racism isn’t a vital civil rights issue, and certainly not high on the School District’s agenda?

That needs to change. Now.

Respectfully,

LaSella L. Hall

Dr. LaSella L. Hall, Ph.D.
NAACP New Bedford Branch, President