# Illinois moves to end Native American mascots in schools amid strong advocacy and controversy



Earlier this month, the Illinois House passed House Bill 1237, legislation aimed at phasing out the use of Native American-based mascots and logos in the state’s elementary and high schools. The bill is now expected to be taken up by the Illinois Senate next month.

Matthew W. Beaudet, an elder of the Montaukett Indian Nation with multicultural Native heritage including Maliseet, Matinecock, Penobscot, and Weskarini descent, has been a prominent advocate for this change. Beaudet has been actively involved in the phase-out process at various schools across Illinois, including Niles West High School in Skokie, Ball Chatham School District 5 in Sangamon County, Huntley and Lemont high schools, and Lane Tech College Prep.

Beaudet, who has experienced personal repercussions for his advocacy—including losing an employment opportunity at a major law firm, being voted out of a local school council seat, receiving threats, and being placed on an enemies list by a national white supremacist group—spoke to the Chicago Sun-Times about his commitment to the cause, emphasising his duty as a citizen, parent, and multi-generational Illinoisan to protect his community.

He recounted his own schooling experience at Weber High School on Chicago’s Northwest Side, where the mascot, called the "Red Horde," involved Native face paint and feathered headdresses. Beaudet said Native students frequently had to endure classmates and their parents adopting stereotypical "Indian" behaviours at school events, while at away games opponents directed hostile and violent chants at them, including threats to "massacre the Red Horde" and dragging mannequins dressed as dead Natives.

Beaudet addressed common arguments made by supporters of Native mascots, describing them as false narratives. These include claims that the mascots are a cherished tradition, honour Native peoples, are educational, or that change would be too costly. He countered these points by stating that Native identity and customs are the traditions of the tribes themselves, not community symbols to be appropriated. He stressed that Native Americans do not want to be used as mascots, rejecting the notion of "honouring" through such caricatures. He drew parallels to the rejection of racist stereotypes like blackface and "yellowface," stating it should be no different for what is commonly called "redface."

The legislation, sponsored by State Representative Maurice West (D-Rockford), is described as cost-neutral and allows schools adequate time to phase out existing uniforms, materials, and floor finishes bearing Native imagery. Beaudet cited examples where schools have successfully made these changes: Lane Tech did not repaint Native imagery during gym floor refurbishment, and Westinghouse College Prep in Humboldt Park retained its "Warriors" name but retired all Native imagery.

Beaudet also argued that Native mascots are not educational and fail to teach anything authentic about Native history or contemporary life. Instead, they perpetuate the harmful idea that Native peoples' identities and cultures can be "owned" or co-opted. He likened this to Loyola University’s former mascot, “Bo the Hobo,” which caricatured homelessness without fostering respect or understanding.

He firmly stated that Native peoples will not be forgotten without mascots: "Black people were not ‘forgotten’ when blackface started becoming frowned upon. Natives, likewise, will not be forgotten when harmful caricatures are discarded." He noted that Native communities remain an integral part of Illinois today, contradicting outdated notions that they belong only to the past.

Beaudet encouraged those wanting to learn more about Native culture or the objections to these mascots to consult Native organisations and communities throughout Illinois, who regularly welcome participation in cultural events. "We are here. We have always been here. And we will still be here when the harmful mascots and logos are long gone," he concluded.

The Chicago Sun-Times is reporting on this legislative development and the perspectives shared by Beaudet, which highlight the ongoing efforts and challenges related to removing Native American mascots from schools within Illinois.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.cbsnews.com/chicago/news/illinois-bill-would-require-remove-native-american-images/> - This article discusses the Illinois bill requiring schools to remove Native American mascot imagery and names, aligning with the legislative efforts mentioned in the original article.
2. <https://www.ilga.gov/legislation/104/HB/10400HB1237.htm> - This is the official text of Illinois House Bill 1237, detailing the legislation aimed at phasing out Native American-based mascots and logos in schools.
3. <https://www.shawlocal.com/illinois-valley/2024/04/02/illinois-bill-seeks-to-ban-native-american-mascots/> - This article reports on the Illinois bill seeking to ban Native American mascots, providing context to the legislative development mentioned in the original article.
4. <https://b100quadcities.com/illinois-bill-would-ban-native-american-k-12-school-mascots/> - This article discusses the proposed Illinois bill requiring K-12 schools to change their mascots if they have a Native American mascot, supporting the legislative efforts mentioned.
5. <https://apnews.com/general-news-6e92b167fe55dc9a9ddd02e2941a4d85> - This article covers the Illinois bill requiring rules for Native American mascot use, including the need for schools to obtain approval from local tribes, aligning with the legislative context provided.
6. <https://www.ilga.gov/ftp/legislation/104/BillStatus/HTML/10400HB1237.html> - This page provides the bill status for HB 1237, detailing the legislative process and actions taken, supporting the information about the bill's progression.
7. <https://chicago.suntimes.com/other-views/2025/04/30/native-americans-mascots-logo-illinois-elementary-high-schools-sports-matthew-beaudet> - Please view link - unable to able to access data