



Ralph Northam
Governor, Commonwealth of Virginia
P.O. Box 1475
Richmond, VA 23218

March 6, 2019

Dear Governor Northam:

In line with your newly declared pledge to use your office to promote racial reconciliation and healing across the Commonwealth of Virginia, Rebrand Washington Football (RWF) urges you to include as part of your initiative an issue that affects the image and well-being of Native Americans in Virginia and beyond: the racist name of the professional football team representing the Washington metropolitan region.

RWF is a grassroots group founded in 2015 by fans of the team who were nevertheless appalled by its racist name and began a campaign to persuade it to change the name. We object to having a team purport to represent us while using a name that is a dictionary-defined slur that demeans Native Americans. Over our four years of activism we have collected more than 7,100 signatures on petitions demanding a name change and visited team headquarters each of the four years to deliver the petitions to team representatives.

The harm to Native Americans by racist and stereotypical team names and imagery has been well documented. In 2005, the American Psychological Association (APA) found that Native American mascots in schools and athletics were detrimental to the learning environment of non-Native and Native youth alike. For non-Native youth, these mascots reinforced negative stereotypes while for Native American youth they perpetuated a hostile learning environment and lowered self-esteem.

Also in 2005, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) passed a resolution prohibiting any college team from “displaying hostile and abusive racial/ethnic/national origin mascots, nicknames or imagery at any of the 88 NCAA championships.”

States and high schools have also been active over the decades in eliminating racist names, mascots, and logos. According to a 2013 report by the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), two-thirds or about 2,000 high schools that had Native American names, logos, and mascots had eliminated them during the preceding 35 years. Also, over previous past 25 years, 28 high schools had dropped their “R-skins” name.

In contrast, Daniel Snyder, the owner of Washington’s football team, remains obstinate in his opposition to changing the name. Snyder’s stubborn defense of the racist name



unfortunately is a continuation of the legacy of George Preston Marshall, the founder of the team, who coined the name for crass marketing purposes and who insisted on its employing only white players until forced to integrate by the Kennedy administration in 1962. RWF believes now is the time to affirm that if this team wishes to play anywhere in the Washington region it must change its racist name.

Governor Northam, the stand we ask you to take must be more than philosophical. The team is nearing the end of its lease at FedEx Field. It is seeking a site for a new stadium, and locations in Virginia are among those being considered for relocation.

We ask you to declare publicly that the government of the Commonwealth will provide no subsidies, tax abatements, infrastructure improvements or any other assistance to the team to locate in Virginia unless it changes its name to one that is not a racial slur.

RWF and its allies are seeking similar commitments from local governments in Maryland and Virginia. However, Virginia has a special obligation to stand by its Native citizens. Virginia earliest existence as an English colony was intertwined with the Native communities it encountered – and eventually conquered and drove from their ancestral land. Today, Virginia is home to two proud Native nations, the Pamunkey and Mattaponi, who carry on the traditions of their ancestors. You owe it to Native citizens of the Commonwealth, those both living and passed, to honor and not demean their traditions.

We ask that you condemn “redface” as no less demeaning and racist than “blackface,” and to do so by standing against a team that has adopted “redface” as a business practice. For you to declare that Virginia will not support a team that employs a racist name and imagery would be an honorable way to promote the racial justice and reconciliation which you are seeking.

We appreciate your consideration of this request and look forward to your reply. You can reach us on rebrandwf@gmail.com. Please visit our website, www.rebrandwf.org, for more information about our organization.

Sincerely,

Ian Washburn
Arlington, VA

Josh Silver
Bethesda, MD

Bill Mosley
Washington, DC