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Dr. Bernard Franklin
Senior Vice President, NCAA
1802 Alonzo Watford Sr. Drive
Indianapolis, Indiana 46202

October 25, 2005

Dear Dr. Franklin:

The Southern Poverty Law Center supports National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) recent ban on the use of Native American mascots by sports teams during postseason tournaments. We also join others in urging that the recent appeal submitted by University of Illinois' board of directors, asking that Chief Illiniwek be exempt from this ban, not be honored.

As you may know, racial and ethnic mascots:

- Distort Native American cultures, promoting stereotypes of the "Noble Savage" and the war-hungry "Native";
- Foster cultural incompetence among students; and
- Harm communities by setting an expectation that racial and ethnic stereotypes are not only accepted, but also should be promoted, on campus;

Further, the consistent use of racial and ethnic caricatures arguably creates a racially hostile environment and contributes to the recent increase in the number of hate crimes and bias-related incidents that happen on college campuses. According to the Prejudice Institute of Baltimore Maryland, more than 500,000 students each year are targets of bias-driven slurs and physical assaults. University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, is no exception, and has a well-documented history of intimidation, assaults, and discrimination as a result of recent debates around retiring Chief Illiniwek.

The NCAA has clearly outlined what it will and will not stand for as it seeks to uphold its core values, which includes a commitment "to an inclusive culture that fosters equitable participation for student-athletes."

We now call for University of Illinois to act in accordance with the recent ban placed on the use of ethnic and racial mascots by member institutions, and join other forward-thinking schools that have retired their offensive mascots.

Sincerely,

Brandon Wilson
College Outreach Coordinator
Southern Poverty Law Center