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**Connecticut to Withhold Funding From  
Towns Appropriating Indigenous  
Culture Under New Law**



*The former logo and team name for Conard High School in West Hartford, Conn. (Photo/vivandlonny via eBay)*

**BY JENNA KUNZE | JUNE 28, 2021**

Connecticut Gov. Ned Lamont last Wednesday signed a bill into law that, beginning next year, will strip state funding from local communities if they keep names or images appropriating Native American culture.

The new law, part of an 837-page [implementor budget \(https://cga.ct.gov/searchresults.asp?cx=005177121039084408563%3Ahs1zq3ague8&ie=UTF-8&cof=FORID%3A10&q=Senate+Bill+1202&submission=%EF%80%82\)](https://cga.ct.gov/searchresults.asp?cx=005177121039084408563%3Ahs1zq3ague8&ie=UTF-8&cof=FORID%3A10&q=Senate+Bill+1202&submission=%EF%80%82), was introduced by Sen. Catherine Oster, D-Sprague, whose district includes the state's two federally recognized tribes, the Mashantucket Pequot and Mohegan Tribal Nations. Oster said she forwarded the legislation in response to requests from five tribal governments—the remaining are state-recognized—in Connecticut.

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“While some people say ‘we’re just trying to honor the Native American community, you can’t honor somebody if they don’t think you’re honoring them,” Sen. Osten told *Native News Online*.

The money at stake comes from two of the state’s highest grossing casinos, owned by the Mashantucket Pequot and Mohegan Tribal Nations. The Mohegan Sun and Foxwoods Resort Casinos contribute \$100 million annually to state coffers, of which \$52 million is distributed to communities around the state.

Collectively, the 12 communities appropriating Native culture receive a \$3 million chunk of funding from the state. Under the current legislation, that money will be withheld beginning June 30, 2022 if the communities do not change their names or imaging.

“If you are going to keep the mascots, you shouldn’t be able to receive money from what is essential to our largest minority-owned businesses... both of them Native American,” Osten said.

Those Connecticut towns include: West Hartford, whose Conard High School changed its Native American mascot in 2015 after debate, but decided to keep the mascot’s name ‘Conard Chieftain;’ Killingly—a community who typically received the largest dollar amount from the tribal fund, totalling \$94,000 per fiscal year—whose Derby High School last year reinstated its “Redmen” mascot; Torrington, whose highschool branding is represented by “Red Raiders”; Wilton, a town that received no dollars from the fund, uses a “Warriors” nickname for school athletics; and Montville, whose school mascot is the “Indian.” In despite the Mohegan Tribe in January 2020 publically decrying (<https://www.courant.com/sports/schools/hc-sp-ap-montville-mascot-20200127-4luwlrtcl5enjifudegdah6u74-story.html>) the name change in 2020.

Alternative to scrubbing their names and mascots, Osten said the 12 communities could retain tribal names from the state if they obtain permission from their local tribe, but they would have to provide written approval from a tribal nation signing off on their namesake.

“They would have to have a resolution from their tribal council,” Osten said. “It can’t be just one person saying, ‘this is okay. They’ve got to be more formal about it.”

In addition to the mascot legislation, Osten introduced a number of other budget items pertaining to Native Americans, including legislation that will strengthen Native American curriculum, remove a statue of a colonizer responsible for the Pequot Massacre ([https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/pequot](https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/pequot-massacre)

[massacres-begin](#)), increase the Mashantucket Pequot and Mohegan Tribal Nations' access to increased revenue in gaming, and exempted records subject to Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation from the Freedom of Information Act.

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## About The Author



**[Jenna Kunze \(/staff-directory/jenna-kunze\)](#)**

*Staff Writer*

Jenna Kunze is a reporter for Native News Online and Tribal Business News. bylines have appeared in The Arctic Sounder, High Country News, Indian Country Today, Smithsonian Magazine and Anchorage Daily News. In 2020, she was 16 U.S. journalists selected by the Pulitzer Center to report on the effects of change in the Alaskan Arctic region. Prior to that, she served as lead reporter at the Chilkat Valley News in Haines, Alaska. Kunze is based in New York.

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