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RESPONSE TO SCHOOLS REMAINING ON STATE'S OFFENSIVE MASCOT REGISTRY

Montrose County School District is extremely disappointed in the Commission's decision today (without explanation) to force an unfunded change of the Johnson Elementary School “Thunderbird,” mascot and to refuse to accept the Montrose High School “Red Hawk,” as an acceptable alternative to the Montrose High School “Indian.” The Commissioners provided no rationale or reasoning for this arbitrary decision and we are deeply troubled that the Commission continues to include these schools on their list of offensive mascots.

As we presented to the Commission in January, the Thunderbird is a cross-cultural mythical creature not specific to or a depiction of Native Americans or Indigenous People. Any instance of the Johnson Thunderbird that could be confused with Indigenous iconography or imagery was changed to a more “animated” or “cartoon,” version.

We have no idea how or why the Commissioners would find the Montrose High School “Red Hawk,” an inappropriate or offensive alternative and we are confident changing the mascot from the “Indians,” to the “Red Hawks,” meets the intent and language of SB 21-116.

Our community has worked hard to meet the requirements this burden has placed on our schools by Governor Polis and the Commission. Thus far, the Commission has been silent toward our repeated requests for clarification and communication on this issue, despite our good faith effort to meet the requirements of this legislative change. Initial reports were that the state would not place the cost burden for these changes on local taxpayers, however that has not been the case. Our School Board has voted to change both the Centennial Middle School “Braves,” to “Bears” and the Montrose High School “Indians,” to “Red Hawks,” and allocated a budget of \$375K in general fund dollars supplied by our local taxpayers to meet the June 1 deadline.

In the coming weeks, we intend to petition Governor Polis for an explanation and rationale behind this decision as well as officially communicate our mascot plan for the coming months.

Our community (and most specifically our students) chose the Red Hawk as our preferred Montrose High School mascot and we have no intention of changing this choice. In addition, we need a further explanation as to why changing the Johnson Elementary School Thunderbird is justified. To meet the deadline and requirements placed on us by the state, we need a timely explanation for our community members, schools, and taxpayers.