



Pokégnek Bodéwadmik  
POKAGON BAND OF POTAWATOMI

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## POKAGON BAND CALLS ON DOWAGIAC UNION SCHOOLS TO END ITS USE OF NATIVE AMERICAN IMAGERY

*Dowagiac Union Schools are located on the homeland  
of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi*

DOWAGIAC, Mich. – October 9, 2023 – The Tribal Council of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians of Michigan and Indiana announced today that it has sent a letter to Dowagiac Union Schools Board President, Ruth Ausra, rescinding an outdated joint-resolution from 1990 approving the use of its “Chieftains” logo. The announcement follows a letter sent to the Pokagon Band Tribal Council by the Dowagiac Union Schools Board of Education on August 9 announcing it has declined to change the logo, despite calls for change from several organizations including the tribe’s Representations Outreach Board. The Pokagon Band Tribal Council formally adopted a resolution in March of 2021 condemning the use of Native American imagery by non-native organizations. Dowagiac Union Schools are located on the homeland of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi.

Many tribes and organizations within the state of Michigan and across the United States have resolutions that condemn and call for ending the use of Native American logos, mascots and nicknames including the [Michigan Board of Education](#), the Michigan Department of Civil Rights, United Tribes of Michigan (which comprise the 12 federally recognized tribes in the state), the Michigan Coalition Against Racism in Sports and Media, and the [National Congress of American Indians](#). There have also been numerous [studies](#) on the damaging effects Native American mascots have on indigenous children, including a resolution by the [American Psychological Association](#), which calls for the end of their use.

To date, several school districts in the state of Michigan have retired their Native American logos, mascots, and nicknames, following consultation with Native American Tribes. In 2022, the [Native American Heritage Fund](#) announced funding to four Michigan school districts to assist with the cost of replacing their mascots including Saranac Community Schools, Hartford Public Schools, Lansing School District, and the Chippewa Hills School District.

A statement from the Pokagon Band Tribal Council said, “It is the long-held view of the Pokagon Band, as well as the view of many other Tribal Nations, that the use of Native American-themed imagery, along with mascots, symbolism, logos, and nicknames by non-Native institutions, organizations and entities, promotes harmful stereotypes and has a detrimental effect on our Native American youth. Although some view Native American-themed mascots and nicknames with reverence, Native American-themed imagery and references perpetuate harmful stereotypes of Indigenous peoples. Generations of Indigenous people have faced oppression, genocide and erasure for hundreds of years and the impacts of which can still be felt throughout our communities to this

day. As we rebuild and work to strengthen our Tribal Nations, we also must work to educate the public about who we are. School districts that continue to use Native American-themed imagery and references that disparage Indigenous cultures, make it harder to build meaningful and accurate relationships within the communities in which we reside.”

Rebecca Richards, Chairwoman of the Pokagon Band Tribal Council added, “The assertion that non-Native American school districts continue to depict a race of people as a logo, mascot or nickname, without providing their students with an accurate and truthful history of how European colonization impacted Native American Tribes, has its roots in colonialism. Although some may argue they are paying tribute to Native Americans, it is not an honor for our people to be depicted as characters. Research has shown the damaging effects logos, mascots and nicknames have on Native American children, who are often subject to harassment, name calling and stereotyping by their non-native peers. Although numerous schools and sports teams around the county have finally begun to listen to Native Americans and right their wrongs, we need to continue to shine a spotlight on the organizations that refuse to make a change because of their alumni pride and personal opinions. **The Pokagon Band remains actively committed to providing consultations to school districts including Dowagiac Union Schools, as well as sports teams and other organizations nationally that have Native-themed logos, mascots and nicknames, that are interested in making a change.**”

Sam Morseau, Secretary of the Pokagon Band Tribal Council and member of the Native Representations Outreach Board shared that the board has tried to contact Dowagiac Union Schools on several occasions to discuss the harmful impacts of Native American themed imagery. “The decision to issue a public statement without engaging in formal consultation is alarming” said Morseau. “We have a responsibility to ensure all students can thrive in a welcoming learning environment, and the school board’s decision negatively impacts efforts in collaboration of federal and state program and services.”

One program that may be impacted is the Title VI program offered by the U.S. Office of Indian Education. This program provides financial and technical assistance for supporting Local Education Agencies, Indian Tribes, and post-secondary institutions in meeting the special educational and cultural related academic needs of American Indians and Alaska Natives. In addition to Title VI, the school district will need to submit tribal affiliation data of indigenous students and staff beginning in the 2024-2025 academic year.

#### **About The Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians of Michigan and Indiana**

The Pokagon Band of Potawatomi’s sovereignty was reaffirmed under legislation signed into law by President Clinton in September of 1994. The Pokagon Band is dedicated to providing community development initiatives such as housing, education, family services, medical care, and cultural preservation for its more than 6,000 citizens. The Pokagon Band’s ten-county service area includes four counties in Southwestern Michigan and six in Northern Indiana. Its main administrative offices are located in Dowagiac, Mich., with a satellite office in South Bend, Ind. In 2007, it opened Four Winds Casino Resort in New Buffalo, Mich., followed by Four Winds Hartford in 2011, Four Winds Dowagiac in 2013 and Four Winds South Bend in January 2018. The Pokagon Band operates a variety of non-gaming businesses through its investment enterprises, Mno-Bmadsen and the Pokagon Development Authority. More information is available at [www.pokagonband-nsn.gov](http://www.pokagonband-nsn.gov), [www.fourwindscasino.com](http://www.fourwindscasino.com) and [www.mno-bmadsen.com](http://www.mno-bmadsen.com).

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