

December 27, 2018

Dear Superintendent Whitmoyer and members of the East Helena School Board,

We are writing to express our deep concern with the choice of “Vigilante” as the mascot for East Helena High School (EHHS), and to respectfully request that the East Helena School Board reconsider this decision. Helena Vigilante Runners, Inc. (HVR) has made use of the name “Vigilantes” (and the color scheme of navy blue and white) since its official founding nearly 10 years ago. East Helena’s use of the same mascot and similar colors would cause considerable confusion for all involved, and would cause irreparable harm to our brand and to our recruitment and fundraising efforts. These concerns are most acutely felt with regard to our “Junior Vigilante” youth program.

HVR is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that incorporated with the state of Montana on January 22, 2009, to “promote health, fitness, and community through group training runs, races, and social events in the greater Helena area.” A 15-member, all-volunteer board of directors governs the organization. The club provides a wide variety of training and racing opportunities that reach over 1,000 runners each year, ranging in age from 7 to 70.

Supporting scholastic running programs has been a key area of focus for the organization from its inception. As just one example, the club is the lead organizer of “The August—The Second-Oldest Footrace in Montana” (the 52nd edition of the race will take place in August of 2019). The race serves as an early-season speed check for the local cross country teams (HHS, CHS, BCHS, JCHS, future EHHS, etc.), plus community runners, with 100% of race entry fees being distributed to those programs. The club also donates an additional \$500 to local schools each year, and provides club volunteers for local cross country and track meets. Each spring, HVR organizes the HEAT Meet, a free introductory track and field meet for girls and boys ages 9, 10, and 11. In short, the club is proud of its relationship with local schools, and hopes to have a similarly positive relationship with East Helena High School and its running programs.

Unfortunately, the entrance of another “Vigilante” mascot (with similar colors) into the local sports scene threatens to undermine these efforts, most notably with our youth programs. Since fall 2015, HVR youth teams have competed in the USA Track & Field (USATF) Montana Junior Olympic Cross Country Championships, an event now hosted by HVR in Helena. HVR also has a thriving track and field program, with members competing in (and winning titles) at the state, regional, and even national levels.

These “Junior Vigilantes,” coached by SafeSport certified volunteers, are proud to run under the Vigilante name and colors as a single united team from the greater Helena area (Helena, East Helena, Montana City, Clancy, etc.). Use of a common name (by EHHS and HVR) would imply an association that could be problematic for both parties. Notably, in USATF-sanctioned events (and other post-season events like Nike Cross Country Regionals and Nationals), runners are not allowed to represent their school. At a minimum, this decision could be a barrier for East Helena runners hoping to enjoy these post-season, team-running opportunities. It would also likely discourage runners from other local high schools, fearing they might be associated with a high school they do not attend.

HVR has worked hard to build its brand awareness, and has a considerable financial investment at stake. Since 2009, we have invested many thousands of dollars in branded equipment and apparel including pop-up tents, start/finish arch, stadium sign, flag, banner, brochures, racing singlets, long- and short-sleeve shirts, hats and caps, socks, water bottles, stickers, etc. We also have a “more than financial” investment in the name and colors, having worked countless hours in developing a unique and recognizable identity of which we are very proud. Therefore, we appeal to you to help avoid the confusion, loss of value, and loss of spirit that would result from moving forward with this decision. By choosing the Wolverines (even while sticking with the proposed colors), the Board could move ahead with a publicly supported and unique mascot that is free of any such conflicts. The avoidance of any confusion with Vigilante Stadium would be an important added benefit.

In closing, HVR understands that this is a significant request, but the issues described above warrant reconsideration of “Vigilantes” as the EHHS mascot. We look forward to the opportunity to discuss these concerns, and to provide additional information in support of the requested remedy. HVR hopes to resolve this issue amicably. However, we also wish to protect our common law trademark rights to the Vigilante name, as it pertains to sports teams in the Helena area.

Thank you for this opportunity to address you,

Sincerely,

Helena Vigilante Runners Board of Directors

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