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Dear WPIAL board,

We, the council of the borough of Swissvale, are writing regarding the football game on October 30, 2020 between Woodland Hills and Peters Township. As you are likely aware, there is a photo circulating that shows the drum majors of Peters Township High School band in full black morph suits with white clothing and a wig over the suits. We want to amplify the voices of our neighbors and the children in our community that found the costumes offensive.

Peters Township has done their own investigation and suggested that the students did not have malicious intent with their costume choice. They should have known how this would be perceived. Even under the best of circumstances it was still highly racially insensitive and should never have occurred. From everything we have heard from members of our community, this type of behavior is not a new experience for the students of Woodland Hills. It is part of a pattern of insensitivity and racial intimidation. Our coaches and athletic staff must give players the "talk" before entering into districts such as Peters Township, reminding them to ignore the racial slurs that are hurled their way while they are guests in their facilities.

This is unacceptable, the onus should not be on the people being insulted. When will we say that enough is enough? There is plenty of culpability to go around, the students, parents, the band director, Milt Barney, who according to the Tribune Review, told Ron Coursey that he didn't think it [the costume] would be offensive. If a staff member of Peters Township does not understand why this action would be perceived as racist, then that reveals the existence of a systemic problem within the district. I would hope that you take this with the utmost seriousness and advocate and intervene for students of color across Western Pennsylvania so that this type of behavior is not allowed to continue.

We are aware that the offense was by the band and not the football team, but it was a part of the entire athletic event. Sometimes sports teams are penalized in the game for the behavior of their fans. This shows us that while they may not have been directly responsible for the action, they are still culpable. This behavior will only continue as long as it is not addressed and there are no penalties for such behavior.

WPIAL needs to take a stand and stop allowing our children to be denigrated with race baiting behavior. We are asking that you assist in making sure that this behavior is not accepted or tolerated. There should be a consequence to the behavior. But, aside from this particular incident, if other incidents occur the WPIAL board must put their full power behind giving consequences to teams that engage in this behavior. Our team should not have to be penalized and forced to engage in a disrespectful environment particularly when we are trying to teach our students about team spirit and sportsmanship. Athletic programs that engage in this type of behavior should not be allowed to laugh it off and continue to abuse their competitors. The consequence should be the offending team forfeiting the game and if the behavior occurs again forfeiting the season and being suspended. Behaviors like this do not happen in isolation and it falls on those who have the ability to not enable this type of behavior to step up.

As a board your actions speak louder than words and you need to take a firm stance against these types of macro aggressions against members of our community. To be clear, particularly going forward, we want to make sure our children's right to participate in sports without racialized harassment is upheld. This can only be done when the responsible groups of authority, such as the WPIAL board, makes sure that these aggressive behaviors are condemned and that there are consequences for the actions. Part of this responsibility also includes rehabilitative measures that forge understanding and unity. We will not stand by and allow our children to be intimidated. We urge you to make sure our children are not subjected to racialized aggression without consequence or redress.

Sincerely,  
Swissvale Borough Council