

Statement by the UNH School of Law Faculty

We, a majority of the members of the UNH Law faculty, stand together in advocating for the removal of the words “Franklin Pierce” from the name of the law school and intellectual property center. Including the name of a historical figure in an institution’s brand is and should be an honor bestowed on very few, worthy individuals. Franklin Pierce is unworthy of that honor.

Pierce’s time as President was marked by his reputation as a pro-slavery Northerner and his backing of the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 that allowed slavery to expand into the West. Pierce’s views on slavery were troubling and wrong. During his inaugural address, Pierce stated,

“I believe that involuntary servitude, as it exists in different States of this Confederacy, is recognized by the Constitution. I believe that it stands like any other admitted right, and that the States where it exists are entitled to efficient remedies to enforce the constitutional provisions. ... I believe that the constituted authorities of this Republic are bound to regard the rights of the South in this respect as they would view any other legal and constitutional right, and that the laws to enforce them [(relating to the Compromise of 1850 and its fugitive slave law)] should be respected and obeyed, not with a reluctance encouraged by abstract opinions as to their propriety in a different state of society, but cheerfully and according to the decisions of the tribunal to which their exposition belongs.”

While he may have been a product of his time, he is not a historical figure worthy of the honor of having New Hampshire’s only law school, part of the state’s flagship public university, named after him.

We recognize that the University has only recently re-included Pierce’s name in the law school’s brand, although it has been part of the school’s intellectual property center’s name since the center’s creation in 2010. In including Franklin Pierce’s name in the IP Center in 2010 and reincorporating it into the law school’s name in 2019, the school prioritized its marketing efforts, noting the brand’s reputation in the United States and overseas, its importance to alumni, and its strong association with excellence in intellectual property law. It did not reincorporate Pierce’s name out of any desire to honor the man—quite the opposite, as the law school explicitly acknowledged Pierce’s failures as a leader. Nonetheless, it is past time to jettison any connection between this school and a president whose values we reject in the strongest terms.

In removing the Pierce name from our institution, we would be making an unambiguous statement about our values. UNH Law stands for racial justice in our legal system. We stand for the abolition of systemic racism and inequality. We stand for repudiating Franklin Pierce’s racist, pro-slavery legacy.