

March 12, 2024

Health and Government Operations Committee  
House Bill 179-Indigenous People's Day (FAV)  
Sponsor: Delegate J. Lewis

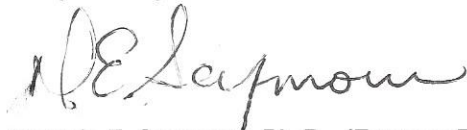
Dear Chair Pena-Melnyk and Members of the Committee,

I am Dennis Seymour, Chair of the Baltimore American Indian Center Heritage Museum and I speak in favor of Bill 179 to replace Columbus Day with Indigenous People's Day in Maryland. It is a rare opportunity that we have today to correct the historical record. The Indigenous People of North America have occupied the North American continent (Turtle Island) for over 23,000 years according to the most recent fossil record. Christopher Columbus never set foot on the North American continent. His three ships and crew landed in the Bahamas and then Hispaniola and immediately assessed the native population for enslavement. They thought that they were in the West Indies and recognized the Natives as "Indians". Yet, the "European Doctrine of Discovery" awarded him those lands in the name of Queen Isabella of Spain.

Maryland school children to this day can name the three ships that Columbus sailed on. Yet, they cannot name a single tribe that lived in Maryland before the European incursion. Maryland's celebration of Indigenous People's day would go a long way to correct this false narrative. According to the 2020 Census, Maryland has 128,650 declared Native Americans. This number is up from 39,000 in in the 2000 Census. There are not 90,000 more Natives in Maryland. just a much greater recognition of Native American roots.

The Native People of the Maryland region have managed to have the offensive name of the Wahington NFL football team changed along with many local school sports teams. Baltimore City and seventeen states including Virginia have also replaced the Columbus Day holiday with Indigenous People's Day. It is time that Maryland followed suit. In honor of the three Maryland recognized tribes; the Piscataway, Piscataway-Conoy, and the Accohannock along with the thousands of us with Native heritage, I urge the Committee to vote favorably on Bill-179.

Respectfully Submitted,



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