

Committee: HGO

Bill # HB 179 Indigenous Peoples' Day - Rule of Interpretation and Replacement of Columbus

Position: OPPOSE

Date: March 14, 2024

My name is Tricia LaFerrara Slawinski. I am writing to the Committee on Health and Government Operations to **OPPOSE House Bill 179 - Indigenous Peoples' Day - Rule of Interpretation of Columbus Day.**

As written, HB 179 may seem to be a simple piece of legislation that changes the observed Maryland State holiday of Christopher Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples' Day. However, this change will strongly impact the heritage of Italian Americans.

Approximately 17 to 18 million Americans are of Italian ancestry (291,000 in Maryland). Italian immigrants brought to this country a tradition of self-sufficiency, hard work, and national service. Notwithstanding this, Italian Americans were themselves often victims of prejudice, discrimination, and disparagement. I can attest to this through personal experience.

Italian navigators and explorers, including Christopher Columbus, were part of the Age of Exploration, beginning in the 15th Century. His voyages across the Atlantic paved the way for European settlement and exploration of the Americas. While the voyages of Columbus were daring, his enslavement of native inhabitants of the West Indies is to be condemned.

However, the efforts to rebrand Columbus Day should not be aimed at vilifying one man. This is not fair. Christopher Columbus was a man of his times; a time during which enslavement was not viewed with the horror it is today.

We cannot erase history and the sins of the past. It would be better to use our shared history as a guidepost for future generations of Americans.

On July 4, 2020, I witnessed the Christopher Columbus monument brought down by protesters, decapitated, and dumped in the Inner Harbor. I also witnessed The Baltimore City Police in attendance doing nothing to stop it. I also read that a current member of the Baltimore City Council was quoted to say, "Good Riddance". This is an elected official who is supposed to be a role model to constituents; how unprofessional and disrespectful.

The Committee will receive both oral and written testimony pertaining to the many contributions Italian Americans brought to the United States of America. Italian Americans worked hard to achieve success. This did not come easy. They fought their way through many hardships, slander and ethnic conflicts. And, they never gave up.

For these reasons, I ask the Committee to give an UNFAVORABLE report to HB 179.

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