



**COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE®**  
*Order Sons and Daughters of Italy in America®*

219 E Street, N.E. • Washington, D.C. 20002  
(202) 547-2900 • (202) 546-8168 (FAX) • [www.osia.org](http://www.osia.org)

March 14, 2024

Chair Person Joseline Pena  
201 James Senate Office Building  
11 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Ms. Pena

On behalf of the Commission for Social Justice, the anti-defamation arm of the Order Sons and Daughters of Italy in America (OSDIA), I would like to express our regret that the State of Maryland is considering to replacing the second Monday of October—the federal Columbus Day holiday—with Indigenous Peoples' Day. OSDIA is the largest organization of Italian Americans. Our mission is to promote the Italian culture, heritage, and contributions that our ancestors have made to this great country and the world. We are shocked that you are considering the implementation of any measure that discredits him.

Since 1937, Columbus Day has been a federally recognized holiday that celebrates a world-changing vision. In 1492, following the rise of the Ottoman Empire, which made it virtually impossible for Europeans to trade with Asia, it was Columbus who set out West in hopes of finding a new path East. Although it is understood that Christopher Columbus never step foot on American soil, it goes without saying that his voyage is the one that changed the world. It was he who opened up a new land of opportunity to the *oppressed* masses of Europe. His arrival marks the time in history when Europeans began to make important worldly contributions, such as those in arts, law, government, and economics that have become the basic foundation of this great nation. It is those contributions that the United States government recognized our favorite son of Genoa, Italy.

For Italian Americans, as well as other immigrant groups, who came over as oppressed masses in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was Columbus who served as their champion and gave them hope of a new life, one with opportunity. Thus, for Americans of Italian descent, Columbus Day serves as an opportunity to celebrate our ancestors and the struggles they overcame to assimilate into American culture. It is unjust to take away the symbol of their very identity and the contributions they have made since the early 1900s.

The false narrative disguised as historical facts surrounding Christopher Columbus and his colonization of the Americas was a push by the woke cancel culture to demonize Columbus as a slave trader who spread disease among the indigenous peoples. They proclaim the same skewed arguments that Howard Zinn presented in his one-sided tale of Columbus in *A People's History of the United States*. Zinn's story, as well as the story of the modern-day American Indian, presents an overly simplistic view that is completely out of context to the time in which he lived. Surely you realize the conundrum of applying a 21<sup>st</sup> century understanding of morality to the people of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

*The Commission for Social Justice is the anti-defamation branch of the Order Sons and Daughters of Italy in America, the world's largest and longest-established organization representing Italian American men and women.*

We are in full support of recognizing indigenous day, why must such recognition replace Columbus Day? With only 12 recognized federal holidays that leaves 353 possible days for the State of Maryland to recognize the contributions of the indigenous people.

Though we are in full support of this, it is equally unjust to take away from Italian Americans a day that represents *their* roots, history and contributions to this country. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. expressed these sentiments best when he stated: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

I hope that you exhibit the same unbound courage and resolve that Columbus did when he set out in the summer of 1492 and urge you and all of Maryland's Elected officials to recognize the contributions of the indigenous people made to this great nation and your city on a **day other than Columbus Day.**

We at the Order Sons and Daughters of Italy in America believe in diversity and tolerance by **Addition**, *not* by **Subtraction** or **Substitution**.

Sincerely,



Robert M. Ferrito  
President, Commission for Social Justice  
Order Sons and Daughters of Italy in America

CC: Michael Polo, National President, Order Sons and Daughters of Italy in America  
Anita Lombardi Riley, State President, Grand Lodge of Maryland  
Order Sons and Daughters of Italy in America Supreme Council  
Commission for Social Justice Board of Directors, Voting Members, and Resource Persons  
Bonnie Cullison Co-Chair, Education, Health, and Government Affairs Committee  
Kathy Szeliga Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee