

My name is Jennifer Folayan. I am Cherokee and Pueblo. I am a proud board member of the Baltimore American Indian Center in Baltimore City and a member of INDIGENOUS STRONG.

The Baltimore American Indian Center (BAIC) is an Urban American Indian Community Center and nonprofit organization that was founded in 1968 and established to assist and support American Indian and Alaskan Native families with moving into an urban environment and adjusting to the culture change they will experience. The BAIC also serves as a focal point for the Indian community for social and cultural activities and to educate non-native people about the cultures of the North American Indian and Alaskan Native communities. We have served the community in Maryland for over 50 years and provide a space to represent "We are still here."

The Mission of INDIGENOUS STRONG is to stand for our RIGHTS and RECOGNITION as Native and Indigenous People so that our history and modern-day presence is NOT erased. Our first actions include organizing legislation to recognize Indigenous People's Day in Baltimore City and moreover in the State of Maryland. This group provides a point of communication for these efforts. We most recently held a rally at the Columbus Statue in the Inner Harbor on the Friday after Thanksgiving declaring to abolish Columbus Day and celebrate Red is the new Black Friday.

In his own journals, Columbus graphically describes raping indigenous women and sex-trafficking children ("those from nine to ten are now in demand.") His men would cut off the hands of Taino people who did not bring them the required amount of gold, tying their severed hands around their necks. Within 50 years of Columbus landing on the island, 95 percent of the Taino population had died. We support the changes to abolish Columbus Day, a holiday that celebrates a purveyor of genocide, to instead declare a holiday that celebrates the Native American community that calls Maryland home. Maryland can demonstrate its place in American politics and American history by showing solidarity with the other states who honor Indigenous People's Day.

As a native woman, and member of my Indigenous community, I ask that House Bill 895 be passed. Please take this action as a way to honor our people and allow us to heal from the many tragic effects of such historic events and misrepresentations. We are still here!

In honor of Women's history month and the initiatives our women here are making, I offer a Women's Warrior song given to us by Martina Pierre of the Lilwat Nation of British Columbia, Canada.

In Canada, of the women who go missing or are murdered each year, 80% are Aboriginal. These numbers are increasing in the states as well. Many of our women have disappeared on what is now referred to as the Highway of Tears. As we abolish Columbus Day and the legacy of violence against our women, may the tears of our people be honored and not forgotten.

(<https://youtu.be/mlAZjca2YMo>)

Thank you,

Jennifer Folayan

Board Member of Baltimore American Indian Center

Member of INDIGENOUS STRONG