

Testimony in Support of House Bill 895: Indigenous Peoples' Day – Rule of Interpretation and Replacement of Columbus Day

From a young age, we are taught of the awe, bravery, and wonder of Christopher Columbus and other European settlers, a falsified and whitewashed version of history which obscures the reality that these early European settlers were instrumental in the systemic murder of over 55 million indigenous people. *The lies we are taught, disguised in history book rhymes, erase the generations of trauma, death, and genocide that indigenous communities are still reconciling with.* American Indians and Alaska Natives in the United States still face systemic injustices in health, public safety, education and employment¹. In our political system, American Indians and Alaska Natives are also disenfranchised of their right to vote, and subsequently have some of the lowest voter turnout rates of minority groups in this country.

In order to begin to reconcile the present with the past, as well as authentically and wholeheartedly include and welcome indigenous communities into the United States political system, we must take this important first step in officially changing Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples' Day. At a time when an increasing number of states and cities throughout the country are replacing and leaving behind Columbus Day for Indigenous Peoples' Day, we must join them.

We must remove the whitewashed versions of colonial violence from our school lessons, our calendars, and our conscience. Instead, we must remember, we must mourn, and we must celebrate history and truth. By renaming Columbus Day as Indigenous Peoples' Day, we are showing indigenous communities all across the state of Maryland, that we are committed to creating a political system that is not built on the lies propagated by settler-colonialism or the erasure of genocide, but on the inclusion of those who have for too long been marginalized and forgotten. How can we expect to truly include people into our nation, into our political process, and into our hearts, if we exclude their truths and their histories?

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¹ <http://www.ncai.org/about-tribes/demographics>