

Ambar Francis
Position: Favorable
Testimony for House Bill 0565

Good morning Chairman and Health and Government Operations Committee

My name is Ambar Francis, a student at the University of Maryland, College Park. I am here today to ask you to vote favorably for house bill 565: Indigenous Peoples' Day – Rule of Interpretation and Replacement of Columbus Day.

Ever since grade school, especially during my elementary school days, I remember learning about Christopher Columbus. Discussing who he was and his impact on discovering “undiscovered land” here in America. Putting him on a pedestal as one of our founding fathers is absurd to me with the truth being that he was a danger to the indigenous people. As I grew older, it shocked me to learn that he did absolutely nothing in the discovery of land here because it was already occupied by the native people, known as the tainos. These individuals were already living here way before Christopher Columbus stepped foot onto their land. It is true that he was the one who paved the way for European colonization and exploitation of the Americas in which this is not something we should celebrate and certainly not take a day off in honor of him. Celebrating him goes completely against our values as a nation and discredits the history of the indigenous people. If this day remains as “Columbus Day”, what is it that we are honoring and proud of as a nation exactly?

The replacement of Columbus Day into Indigenous Peoples Day can bring many positives in educating our youth on the truth about America. This bill can shift the honorable focus from Christopher Columbus to Indigenous people and begin a new structure for the education system, specifically in history/social studies. In addition to the positives this bill can bring, it can teach the use and history of the term “immigrants” in honoring the indigenous folks as the only native people. The definition of an immigrant is “the act of coming to live permanently in a foreign country.” Indigenous people are native to America. This refers to them living in America before the arrival of colonists and settlers, such as Christopher Columbus himself.

The implementation of this bill reveals the true telling's of the history in America. For many years, history/social studies in schools has been tweaked and covered up. For too long, multiple groups of color have been neglected in which the time is up for that. It's about time we begin telling the truth about our nation.