



TESTIMONY TO THE HEALTH AND GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS COMMITTEE

HB 565: Indigenous Peoples' Day- Rule of Interpretation and Replacement of Columbus Day

POSITION: Support

BY: Nancy Soreng, President

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The League of Women Voters is fully committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion in principle and in practice. Diversity refers to population groups that have historically been underrepresented in socially, politically, or economically powerful institutions and organizations.

The League thus supports **House Bill 565: Indigenous Peoples' Day – Rule of Interpretation and Replacement of Columbus Day**. This bill would establish Indigenous Peoples' Day as a Maryland State holiday, to celebrate the history, cultures, and achievements of Indigenous peoples, and to honor their continued presence in our state and nation. It would acknowledge the resilience of Indigenous Peoples in their centuries-long struggle to maintain the viability of their customs, traditions, values, and societies.

Indigenous Peoples populated the Western Hemisphere for tens of thousands of years before the arrival of Europeans. **But in the 130 years following first contact, it is estimated that Native America lost 95% of its population.** Millions of Native peoples died from brutal colonization, forced relocation, murder, disease, and slavery.

Per "Native Knowledge 360 Degrees" from the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian:

"European contact resulted in devastating loss of life, disruption of tradition, and enormous losses of land for Indigenous peoples in the Americas.... Celebrating Columbus and other explorers like him dismisses the devastating losses experienced by Indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere in the past and the ongoing effects of colonization today"

And those ongoing effects of race-based policies, redlining, and economic and political discrimination continue today. For example, the National Women's Law Center estimates that Native American women in the U.S. workforce are typically paid only 60

cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men - which amounts to a loss of \$986,240 over the course of a forty-year career.

Replacing Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples' Day does not minimize the effect that enslavement, cultural destruction and racist policies have had on Indigenous societies. But it will be recognition of the devastation that Columbus wreaked on Native communities in the Caribbean and beyond, as well as acknowledgment of the fact that Indigenous peoples continue to thrive. It will offer an opportunity to learn about the rich history and culture of our Maryland Native Tribes, including the Piscataway, Accohannock, Assateague, Pocomoke, and Nause-Waiwash, among others. Many states, including Maine, Oregon, Louisiana, New Mexico, Iowa, and Washington D.C. have already changed the name of the holiday.

And replacing Columbus Day with indigenous Peoples' Day also does not in any way minimize or negate the rich cultural history and achievements of Italian-Americans. But continuing to elevate Christopher Columbus to hero whitewashes history, and negates the tremendous suffering of Indigenous Peoples after European arrival. **Maryland should change the focus of October 12 from celebrating the conquerer to celebrating the People who survived.**

The League urges the committee to give a favorable report to House Bill 565.