

March 11, 2025

HOUSE BILLS 0117 (HB0117)- - Italian Heritage- SUPPORT

Dear Chairperson, Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk, Delegate Bonnie Cullison and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to strongly **SUPPORT** the **HB117** sponsored by Delegate Nino Mangione, which proposes to require the Governor annually to proclaim the month of October as Italian Heritage Month.

As an educator, historian, philanthropist, community member and above all ambassador of Italian language, culture, and history (with direct tie with the Italian government and the Italian Embassy in Washington DC), I believe this bill is crucial to establish an important understanding of the very identity of our beautiful State of Maryland. Among all 50 states across the U.S., Maryland has an essential link with Italian language, heritage, and history that has no equal in the history of our country. This is clearly supported by many historical facts. Among the many I would like to list a few here:

1. Italians first arrived in Maryland before arriving in any other colonies: In 1651, Lord Baltimore released a **Proclamation to grant land ownership** to “Any person of French, Dutch of **Italian** descent...in the same manner as to persons of British or Irish descent.” Maryland became the first and only colony where Italians were allowed to own land.
2. The **Maryland State Motto** [*Fatti maschii, parole femine*] is the only motto written in the Italian language in the United States. It was first adopted in 1622 by Lord Baltimore to commemorate the death of his beloved wife Anne Mynne Calvert.
3. **The name of Maryland** (in Latin: Terra Mariae) is the only name of a state that came from a person of Italian descent. It was chosen in 1634, not so much in honor of the Virgin Mary (as it is occasionally stated) but in honor of the **Queen Henriette Maria** of France who was the queen of England, Scotland, and Ireland having married King Charles I on 13 June 1625. She is the daughter of the Florentine Maria De Medici (1573-1642), from whom she was named. Her mother was born at the Palazzo Pitti of Florence, Italy and taught her Italian language. Queen Maria was both Catholic and an Italian speaker of Italian descent.
4. When Baltimore was the **second-leading port of entry for immigrants**, after Ellis Island in New York City), in 1732 Lord Baltimore appointed **Onorio Razzolini** (native of Asolo near Venice) to be **Armourer and Keeper of Maryland** between 1732 and 1747. He was basically the Military Commander in Chief in charge of the defense of the entire territory of Maryland. Mr. Razzolini was also the Guardian of Elizabeth Calvert (daughter of the Governor of Maryland). **Razzolini was the first Italian to ever hold public office in the history of the United States.**
5. **Vincenzo Luca Palmisano** was a native of **Termini Imerese**, Palermo, Sicily (born on June 13, 1883) who came in Baltimore is the first Italian born to hold a position as a House of Delegate and House of Representative in the history of the United States. He was elected to the Maryland House of Delegates in 1914, and in 1915 was elected to the Baltimore City Council. In 1926 he ran for United States Congress and was the nation’s first Italian-born U.S. Congressman serving in the house of Representatives from 1926 to 1938.
6. **Rev. Charles Constantine Pise** (1801-1866) was an Italian American cleric and writer born in Annapolis, Maryland and son of an Italian-born father is the first (and, to date, only) Roman Catholic United States Senate Chaplain in the history of the United States (appointed in 1832). He is also the first American to ever be ‘knighted’ by the Pope when Pope Gregory XVI recognized him as a knight of the Sacred Palace and Count Palatine in 1832.
7. **William Paca** signer of Declaration of Independence Signer, was likely from Italian and English ancestry. He became the first Italian-American Chief Justice and Governor of Maryland in U.S. History.

8. **The Battle Monument** is the *oldest stone monument* and first public *war memorial* in the United States (made with Carrara marble, it features the statue of **Lady Baltimore**, which was created by the Italian artist Antonio Capellano)
9. Through the Maryland Clothing MFG. Inc run by the Piccinini family, Maryland was at the primary industry within the U.S to providing textile manufacturing for the production of military uniforms during WW2.
10. Currently Maryland hosts the largest number of first-generation Italians involved in many scientific fields; such as medical research for oncology, cardiology, coloproctology, and osteology (Johns Hopkins Medical Center) scientific explorations via the Space Telescope Science Institute (STScI) in Baltimore MD, and transportation of the largest containers in the world via the Mediterranean Shipping Company I the Port of Baltimore. The contributions of these Italian women and man to the wellbeing of Maryland citizens is hard to describe in few words.

These selected facts (there are more but I included just a few), support the fact that the very origin, establishment and prosperity of Maryland (since its conception to today) owes immensely to the hard work of Italians and Italian Americans from multiple generations. Currently our state does not have in place any specific venue to celebrate Italian heritage within the state though appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities. I believe that this bill will be instrumental to make this happening.

For this and all the reasons listed above, I am writing to strongly SUPPORT HB 0117.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration of this matter.

Most sincerely,

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