



# National Christopher Columbus Association

James P. McCusker, President

5034 Wisconsin Ave, NW  
Washington, DC 20016

December 2, 2016

The Honorable Brandon M. Scott  
Baltimore City Council  
100 Holliday Street  
Suite 500  
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

Dear Councilman Scott:

I write to you today to express the strong opposition of the National Christopher Columbus Association to your proposed legislation to designate the second Monday of October - the federal Columbus Day holiday - as "Indigenous Peoples and Italian-Americans Day."

Your proposal reflects an unfortunate misunderstanding of the purpose of the holiday, and I invite you and your colleagues on the City Council of Baltimore to consider carefully the historical background of the Columbus holiday and the declaration of the members of Congress who voted to establish it in law.

The official Senate committee report of June 21, 1968 made their purpose abundantly clear: the holiday would be "an annual reaffirmation by the American people of their faith in the future, a declaration of willingness to face with confidence the imponderables of an unknown tomorrow. It is also the committee's judgment that the observance of Columbus Day is an appropriate means of recognizing the United States as a 'nation of immigrants' as we were described by the late President Kennedy."

While the creation of the holiday was strongly supported by the Italian-American community, reflected in the support of Senators John Pastore (D-RI) and Peter Rodino (D-NJ), it was never intended to be solely a holiday for a single ethnic group. As the senators saw it, "By commemorating the voyage of Columbus to the New World, we would be honoring the courage and determination which enabled generation after generation of immigrants from every nation to broaden their horizons in search of new hopes and renewed affirmation of freedom."

These sentiments have been reiterated by every American president during the intervening years. In 1998, President Bill Clinton's statement was a concise endorsement of the intent of Congress: "Today our Nation stands on the threshold of a new millennium, an uncharted time of great challenge and opportunity. To fulfill the promise of this new era, we must be adventurous, willing to leave known shores, and eager to embrace change. To find inspiration for this momentous journey, we need only look to the example of Christopher Columbus, who helped usher in a similar Age of Discovery more than 500 years ago . . . As we enter a new era, let us embrace Columbus' spirit of discovery and embrace as well the great diversity of cultures, religions, and ethnic traditions that we enjoy because so many have followed his course to this great land."

This year, President Obama added his support to this conception of Columbus Day when he declared that "The spirit of exploration that Columbus embodied was sustained by all who would follow him westward, driving a desire to continue expanding our understanding of the world." He added, "As we mark this rich history, we must also acknowledge the pain and suffering reflected in the stories of Native Americans who had long resided on this land prior to the arrival of European newcomers." And he added: "We have made great progress together in recent years, and we will keep striving to maintain strong nation-to-nation relationships, strengthen tribal sovereignty, and help all our communities thrive."

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President Obama concluded by describing the spirit in which all Americans should mark Columbus Day: "More than five centuries ago, one journey changed the trajectory of our world -- and today we recognize the spirit that Christopher Columbus's legacy inspired. As we reflect on the adventurers throughout history who charted new courses and sought new heights, let us remember the communities who suffered, and let us pay tribute to our heritage and embrace the multiculturalism that defines the American experience."

The city of Baltimore should embrace President Obama's central message: that Columbus Day is an opportunity for *all* Americans to celebrate both the "spirit of exploration" that Columbus embodied and which has become a hallmark of America, *and* celebrate as well the hard-won success that we have had over the past 500 years in the often difficult process of becoming one people.

Your proposed legislation would move Baltimore in exactly the opposite direction, dividing us into ethnic subgroups, rather than offer a vision of America that includes us all behind a set of common ideals. President Obama's theme of unity, not division, should guide Baltimore in its actions on this subject.

Sincerely,

James P. McCusker  
President  
National Christopher Columbus Association

cc: The Hon Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, Mayor  
Bernard C. "Jack" Young, Council President  
James B. Kraft, Councilman  
Robert Curran, Councilman  
Bill Henry, Councilman  
Rochelle Spector, Councilwoman  
Sharon Green Middleton, Councilwoman  
Nick Mosby, Councilman  
Helen Holton, Councilwoman  
William Welch, Councilman  
Edward Reisinger, Councilman  
Eric Costello, Councilman  
Carl Stokes, Councilman  
Warren Branch, Councilman  
Mary Pat Clarke, Councilwoman