

New York State Commission for Social Justice
2023 Winter Plenary Session
Report

Brothers and Sisters, I am please to report to you on the activities of the Commission for Social Justice. As many of you know I have been sick and in the hospital most of the December and finally released on January 5th. I will begin chemo treatments on January 31st for four months and then five weeks of radiation. The good news is after all these fun things I will be cancer free I also want to thank all my brothers and sisters for their cards, phone calls, text messages, emails and prayers as I fight this cancer diagnoses. I want to thank Eleanor for filling in for me and my great Executive Board to stay active in our fight for our heritage.

2023 CSJ Luncheon

This year's CSJ Luncheon is postponed and will rescheduled at a later date.

Attacks on Columbus and our Holiday

Queens Senator Ramos and Brooklyn Assemblymember Marcela Mitaynes Continue their attack on Columbus

Senator Ramos is at it again. She reintroduced a resolution in the New York State Senate to remove Columbus Day holiday and replace it with Indigenous Peoples Day. This bigoted resolution was also introduced in the Assembly by Assemblywoman Marcela Mitaynes. I am urging all of you to reach out to your legislators and urge them to vote against this resolution. We were told that Governor Hochul will not support this legislation, but we should cut it out before it comes to a vote in the Senate and Assembly.

Please take this threat and take action immediately to fight this bigoted resolution. Call your State Representatives and let them hear your concerns.

NYC Department of Education continues to disrespect Italian Americans

Last year, we filed under the Freedom of Information records, votes, and emails regarding the decision to change Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples Day. Eleven months later we received a response which was lacking in everything we requested.

Once again, this year the calendar of the Department of Education continues to list Indigenous Peoples Day on Columbus Day. Other City agencies have done the same. I sent a letter to Chancellor David Banks, ccing the mayor protesting this move which was a continued slap in the face to our community. I am awaiting their response if it ever comes. We are still awaiting a response from the Department of Education and the Mayor's Office.

Syracuse

Still waiting the lawsuit to be heard in Syracuse.

As I wrote last quarter our brothers and sisters in Syracuse are fighting hard to prevent the statue of Christopher Columbus in Columbus Circle to be removed. The lawsuit brought by the Columbus Monument Association was heard by Justice Gerald Neri. Every quarter I report on the status of this case. This quarter I am going to give you the time frame for all that has taken place by the Columbus Monument Association. Before I do that, I again want to thank the Italian American Community in Syracuse for their tenacity and vigor in this battle against a bigoted Mayor Walsh.

January 13, 2022, The Columbus Monument Association filed a lawsuit against the Mayor and the City of Syracuse for the removal of the Christopher Columbus Statue.

March 11, 2022, Justice Gerald Nero ruled in favor of the Columbus Monument Association preventing the removal of the statue.

Again, on March 11th, Mayor Walsh and the City filed an appeal against the ruling of Justice Nero

On July 22nd, Mayor Walsh decided to hire Hancock and Estabro, a private high powered law firm to represent Syracuse in this fight. Before this the City of Syracuse attorneys were representing Mayor Walsh and the City. To date, this lawsuit has cost the taxpayers of Syracuse approximately \$100,000.

Again, on July 22nd, the new law firm requested a three month stay in the case which the Columbus Monument Association agreed to. This stay is set to expire on November 13, 2022.

What a waste of time, money and resources is being spent on this bigoted attempt to remove the Statue of Columbus.

Every state/city that is dealing with these attacks on Columbus should follow what our Italian American Communities in both Philadelphia and Syracuse are doing.

Blank State Media Complaint

On September 23rd Blank Slate Media, a local newspaper in parts of Nassau County, ran an editorial “Why Celebrate Columbus Day”. The editorial lacked any kind of journalistic integrity, and no time was taken to examine the facts about Columbus. I responded with a letter stating the facts, that we know are true. And that the writer of the editorial did not take the time to investigate. We are now in the process of going after those that advertise in these newspapers asking them to remove their ads. I want to thank Alison Vitucci, from the Cellini Lodge for bringing this to our attention.

It should be noted that after their bigoted article regarding Columbus Day Blank Slate Media apologized to the Jewish community for a letter to the editor that was published that was widely viewed as anti-Semitic. However, they remained quiet regarding our complaint to them. I guess, Italians don't count and do not need to be respected.

Victories

Philadelphia Wins– The Columbus Statue

Great News!! Our Italian American Community in Philadelphia won their lawsuit against Mayor Kenny and the City of Philadelphia. The Columbus statue will remain and the box that was placed by the city around the statue is finally uncovered. This has been a long battle and thanks to their lead attorney George Bocchetto and the tenacity of the Italian American Community this victory was won. We all have to follow the same action of Philly to fight these bigoted attacks on our Community throughout our Country.

Philadelphia's Battle to Save the Columbus Holiday

The Italian American Community in Philadelphia has been fighting against the City's removal of the Columbus Day Holiday and changing it to Indigenous Peoples Day. The Italian American Community filed a lawsuit against Bigoted Mayor Jim Kenney and the City of Philadelphia claiming this move was discriminatory. George Bocchetto, the lead counsel in this fight has argued this case in Court. Judge Charles C. Damell Jones dismissed the case based on whether the Italian Community had standing, whether they suffered discrimination and whether changing a holiday was the right of free speech. Bocchetto vowed to appeal this case saying the fight is not over. We continue to wait for the decision of this appeal.

Massachusetts Anti Columbus Bill

We were informed that the Joint Committee on State Administration and Regulatory Oversight has voted favorable on H3191 and S2027 to remove Columbus Day and replace it with Indigenous Peoples Day in the State. If passed by the legislature the Columbus Day will be abolished and replaced. We are urging Speaker Ronald Mariano not to support this bill which would kill it.

I am very happy to report that the State Legislature did not bring these bills up for a vote and Columbus Day is still observed in their state. Thank you, Massachusetts!

Brooklyn Columbus Statue

Great News!!! On December 19, 2019 I along with, Felix Ortiz and Mike Arena testified at Brooklyn Community Board 2's Parks Committee regarding their proposal to remove the Columbus Statue in Brooklyn's Civic Center. We received a very frosty reception from the members at the hearing. They did pass a resolution to remove the statue. Great news, we were just informed the city decided not to remove the statue. Thank you, City of New York!

In closing, I want to thank the CSJ Executive Board and our district liaisons and all my brothers and sisters for all their support for our CSJ. Please continue to keep your ears to the ground and should you hear something negative to our community, please notify me immediately.

Fraternally,

John