

New York State Commission for Social Justice
2022 Fall Plenary Session
Report

Brothers and Sisters, I am please to report to you on the activities of the Commission for Social Justice. As, we all have been saying over the last two years, please continue to be safe during Covid.

2022 Columbus Day

Once again, OSDIA and many other Italian organizations proudly marched to the chairs of thousands of spectators during the Columbus Day parade. On our float we had two great singers, Jenna Esposito and Gene DiNapoli who donated their time to add music to all in attendance. This is our day to show our pride and accomplishments made to make America and the world a better place. The day before this parade we marched in the Long Island District one and two parade in Nassau County. I want to thank Keith Wilson and all who were involved in making our parade a success.

2023 CSJ Luncheon

I am happy to report that we are back at holding our annual CSJ Luncheon. This year's event will take place a Verdi's in Westbury. Our honorees are IPP Anthony Naccarato and Joseph Scelsa from the Italian American Museum.

Governor Kathy Hochul

I am very please that this Columbus Day Governor Hochul did proclaim Columbus Day with no reference to Indigenous Peoples Day as was done last year. I am equally pleased that both her and her Republican opponent Lee Zeldin committed their opposition to a proposal in both the New York State Assembly and Senate to replace Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples Day. We are very grateful to both candidates for the support they pledged to our community.

Attacks on Columbus and our Holiday

Syracuse

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.

Philadelphia wins but still loses – The Columbus Statue

The Italian American Community in Philadelphia won two lawsuits against the mayor. The first was to leave the Columbus statue and not remove it. The second one was to remove the box covering the statue that was placed by the city. The Judge who heard the case was an African American Judge the Honorable Paula Patrick. Two great victories. However, Mayor Jim Kenny refused the order to remove the box. The

petitioners asked the court if the community can remove the box and it was granted. Mayor Kenny then stationed three police officers at the statue with the order to arrest anyone trying to remove it.

Now we hear that the City of Philadelphia has decided to appeal the decision of Judge Paula Patrick. We believe that the Italian American Community will be successful in this appeal. As I mentioned above, the example set by both Philadelphia and Syracuse should be duplicated in all cities facing these attacks.

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!

The Death of 17-year-old Claudio Mandia

We are continuing to wait to hear the results of the investigation that is taking place regarding Claudio Mandia's death.

Saturday Night Live Continues mocking Italians

In a recent segment of Saturday Night Live they were doing their usual not funny attacks on individuals. They had a picture of Italy's new Prime Minister Georgia Meloni. They questioned why she was being called a racist because after all aren't Italians black. Robert Ferrito and I discussed this, and we decided to pick our fights. Nothing will come of this with SNL.

METV disrespects Italian Americans

On Columbus Day METV decided to have a Native American woman on promoting her heritage and the struggles they went through. The segment ended with Happy Indigenous Peoples Day. No mention of Columbus Day, a slap in the face to our community. I did draft a letter to the Chairman of Weigel Broadcasting Company objecting to the disrespect shown us.

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.

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.

Ardsley School District

Grade four teacher, Dan Sheridan had a class assignment regarding Columbus Day vs Indigenous Peoples Day. The facts that he presented to the children was false and misleading. He begins with the fact that Columbus could have never discovered America because people were already living here. He talks about cruel and inhuman treatment of the natives and that millions of people were sold into slavery, worked to death, or murdered under his leadership. Then he goes on to say, take moment to remember those lives that we lost. Finally, he asked, “what do you think”? “Should we celebrate Columbus Day or Indigenous Peoples Day”? This is the slanted history he is teaching to impersonate fourth graders. Once again, a letter is being drafted to the superintendent of Ardsley School District. I want to thank Ashley Maranino for bringing this to our attention.

Italian American Museum 2022 Ambassatore Award

I am pleased to announce that I nominated our very own Vincent “Vince” Marmorale to receive this year’s Ambassatore Award. Vince has been with our CSJ Executive Board for many years and has contributed his time if fighting for our community. Vince has been a leader in reminding people of the great Italian achievements over the years. He also did an acclaimed movie, “My Italian Secret” telling the history of Italians during the war saving the lives of Jews that the Germans were searching for during World War II. Congratulations, Vince!

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