

**New York State Commission for Social Justice**  
**2022Summer 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.

**Governor Kathy Hochul**

I am still waiting for a response from Thomas Scarangelo regarding arranging a meeting with the Governor to discuss Italian American issues. Tom did commit to arranging this meeting. One of the major issues we need to have a clear understanding is the Governor's position on Columbus Day. We don't want a repeat of last year's situation where she declared Columbus Day Indigenous Peoples Day and only after a strong backlash, she proclaimed Columbus Day. Columbus Day is approaching so this meeting is of the most importance.

**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. We are pleased to report that Judge Neri announced his decision and ordered the mayor and the city not to remove that Columbus statue.

Mayor Walsh, has decided, although the City of Syracuse is in a major budget shortfall, to appeal the decision. We are awaiting the decision from the appellate court and believe that Syracuse will be victorious.

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.

#### Portsmouth New Hampshire voted to replace Columbus Day

Portsmouth's City Council voted to remove Columbus and replace it with Indigenous Peoples Day. This was done with no notice or seeking feedback from the Italian American Community. When does these attacks stop?

### The Death of 17-year-old Claudio Mandia

Claudio Mandia was a senior in Boarding School EF Academy in Thornwood, New York. When he was 15 years old, Claudio enrolled at EF Academy to experience American culture and to learn amongst students from across the world. In February, he admitted to cheating on a math exam. On February 14<sup>th</sup>, Claudio was expelled from EF Academy. Claudio was pulled from his second period class, notified of his expulsion, and escorted to his dormitory to collect his belongings. He was then taken to a separate wing of EF where he was placed in solitary confinement as he awaited departure from campus. He remained in solitary confinement for four days. The conditions in the isolation room were made unbearable. He was not allowed any human contact, the trash accumulated in his room and on the day before his departure, EF Academy failed to bring his breakfast or lunch. For four days he was forced to endure these conditions. On February 17<sup>th</sup> at approximately 10 a.m., having not heard from Claudio for days, Claudio's sister Martina and a friend pleading with an EF counselor to check on Claudio. The counselor found Claudio dead by hanging.

We are demanding a full and complete investigation of the death of Claudio, and we are demanding that all at EF Academy be fired and charged in his death. The family is represented by lawyer George Bocchetto. I spoke to Bocchetto and told him of our desire to get justice for Claudio. I mentioned to him that we would like to stage a protest at the Westchester County's DA's office, but I don't want to cause any interference. She said a protest would be helpful and I will keep him informed.

One a good note, I did receive a call from New York Attorney General's Office in response to our letters. I was informed that the Attorney General did have a conversation with the DA' Office. I was assured that an investigation is being conducted into the death of Claudio.

### COPOMIAO Meeting

On Saturday, July 23<sup>rd</sup>, COPOMIAO held a meeting at the Columbus Citizens Foundation in Manhattan. Representative from all over our Country was in attendance. At this

meeting we discussed creating a new 501c4 which would give us the ability to lobby elected officials. They also discussed a new Italian American Heritage Curriculum for our schools and various save Columbus Day initiatives. The meeting was very informative and showed a strong organized and unified Italian American Community.

### John Dabbene Contest

The winners of the John Dabbene essay contest are as follows:

District 1 Middle School

Parker Markowski

4 Larkspur Drive

Smithtown, NY 11787

8th grade student at Accomsett Middle School, Smithtown

Dr. Vincenzo Sellaro Lodge #2319

District 7 Middle School

Hannah Ostrander

83 Hamlin Street

Cortland, NY

8th grade student at Cortland Jr. High School

Stella D'Oro Lodge, Cortland

District 8 Middle School

Gabriella Maccarrone

54 Fraser Drive

Hilton, NY 11468

8th grade student at Merton Williams Middle School

Vincent Lombardi Lodge #2270, Rochester.

The Districts that entered the contest are:

District 1 --Middle School and high school. No high school winner.

District 3 - high school. No winner

District 7--middle school. Winner

District 8--middle school. Winner.

### LaBella Lingue Award Program

Submissions were received and the committee is now reviewing each one and will select the winners of this program. I am sorry to report that the only districts that we had submissions from were Districts 1, 2, 3, 7 and 8. This award is \$500, and I know there are students that could use that money. So, please district liaisons, try to get the schools in your district that have an Italian language program to select a student.

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.