

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

Brothers and Sisters, I am pleased to report to you on the activities of the Commission for Social Justice. CSJ has been working very hard to defend our heritage and continue with the positive programs during this period.

2023 CSJ Luncheon

This year's CSJ Luncheon is postponed and will rescheduled at a later date. We are contemplating having our luncheon again next year in February. I will keep you informed once the details are worked out. However, I would like to thank all who have generously donated to CSJ.

Attacks on Columbus and our Holiday

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

Senator Ramos 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. We just cannot wait until the horse is outside the barn. We must remain diligent and make sure our elected representatives hear from us on this issue.

Please take this threat and act immediately to fight this bigoted resolution. Call your State Representatives and let them hear your concerns. If any of your representatives are at a townhall meeting or attending a function in your districts approach them and urge them to vote this legislation done.

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. With still no response I have been placing calls to the Mayor's Office and the Chancellor's office to get a response.

Syracuse

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.

What a waste of time, money and resources is being spent by Mayor Walsh on this bigoted attempt to remove the Statue of Columbus. We continue to support our brothers and sisters in Syracuse in this fight. This month our CSJ Executive Board voted unanimously to send an additional \$1000 to the Columbus Monument Association to help them with their legal costs. I am urging all to support Syracuse in this fight and donate to the Columbus Monument Association.

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.

Southampton

I was informed by Joan Tutt that the Southampton School Board was at it again with an attempt to replace the Columbus holiday with Indigenous Peoples Day. I immediately sent a letter to Superintendent Dyno voicing my strong objection. The next day I received a call from Rocco Carriero informing me that in the last two years the school board decided not to list any holidays on their calendar and just list "schools closed". This decision was made because they wanted to put an end to this fight with both the Italian American and the Indigenous communities.

The very next day we learned there was going to be a school board meeting and on the agenda the Columbus holiday was discussed. Because we believed this issue was dead and did not galvanize our support to be heard, a motion was made to list the second Monday of October as Italian Heritage Day/Indigenous Peoples Day. The lesson learned here is to never again take anything for granted. A tough lesson learned.

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.

Making vandalism of statues a hate crime in New York

Two months ago I sent a letter to Attorney General Letitia James requesting to make it a hate crime to vandalize or destroy any statue or edifice that promotes the positive image of ALL ethnic, racial, and religious groups in New York State. I was delighted to receive a phone call from Attorney General James' Office and a meeting was arranged for us to meet and discuss this issue. That meeting took place on March 21st and was attended by me, Robert Ferrito, and Angelo Vivolo. Also attending was the Attorney General's Office was Joseph Malczewski, Deputy Director of Community Affairs and Richard Sawyer Civil Rights Legal Division. It was a very productive meeting. At the meeting we were told that the Attorney General does not propose legislation but once it is enacted she enforces it. They suggested that we get our legislators to write up a bill proposing to make vandalism of all statues and or edifices that promotes the positive image of all ethnic, religious, and racial groups a hate crime in New York State. We asked if the Attorney General would support such legislation once submitted and we were told to send it to their office to review it and decide. We felt this was a very positive meeting and are now contacting our leaders in Albany.

Just to note, I decided that instead of just asking for attacks on Columbus statues I believed we would have a better chance for approval if we added all groups. I will keep you informed.

Victories

Philadelphia Wins– The Columbus Statue

I am very pleased to report the Italian American Community in Philadelphia were victorious in their fight to save the Columbus statue. The city was ordered to remove the box covering the statue of Columbus and to leave the statue in place. This is a fantastic victory for our Italian American Community. I want to congratulate everyone involved in this fight. Congratulations!

Support for CSJ

I want to thank Robert Graham who set up a tool for people to donate to SCJ with just one click. We are using a protocol “Givebutter” and have a QR code to take on and make the donation. This is a great opportunity for CSJ to raise money from members and those that are not members. You will be seeing the QR Code on all our articles and correspondences.



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

