

Dear Holyoke City Council:

We are citizens of Italian descent and the founders of Italian Americans for Indigenous Peoples Day. We formed this group to amplify the voices of Italians who feel no pride in the celebration of Christopher Columbus. We stand in solidarity with thousands of Indigenous peoples from many tribal nations who live in Massachusetts who are working to rename Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples Day. Our membership includes Italian American residents of Holyoke. We urge you all to stand up for what is right by voting favorably for the Indigenous Peoples Day resolution in Holyoke.

We have listened to the voices of Indigenous peoples and learned the complete history of Columbus, a man responsible for the genocide of the people of the Caribbean and the establishment of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. As a symbol of white supremacy, Columbus is a source of deep pain for Indigenous people. Our continued heroization of this man compounds the intergenerational trauma they carry with them today – the product of centuries of settler colonial brutality endured by their ancestors.

We empathize with Italian Americans who feel that the prospect of renaming Columbus Day means the loss of the hard-fought acknowledgment that we deserve to exist in this country. Like many immigrant groups, our ancestors experienced religious and ethnic discrimination while assimilating in American society. We feel we have a responsibility to use the platform we now have, to ensure that we are not repeating the same patterns of discrimination that our ancestors endured. By advocating for the renaming of Columbus Day, we seek to correct false histories, start making amends for past atrocities, and create an environment where healing can begin.

Too often, debates about Columbus are centered around the feelings and concerns of Italian Americans. Columbus was firmly embedded in our country's founding mythology long before Italians came on the scene. It is time for all of us who are a part of this country's dominant culture to take collective responsibility for our misplaced adulation of Columbus and repair the harm we have caused. We hope you will focus this conversation on Indigenous people – what they need and deserve, and what we all gain by refusing to celebrate him.

Since the 1970s, Indigenous peoples have been teaching us why Columbus Day is harmful and asking for change. To learn more about their efforts in Massachusetts, visit IndigenousPeoplesDayMA.org. Only you have the power to help Indigenous Peoples Day become a reality in Holyoke. We ask that you please listen to the voices of Indigenous people, open your hearts, and honor their wishes.

Sincerely,

Michelle Chalmers, Danielle Deluca, Norah Dooley, Heather Leavell, and Corrie Popp
Co-Founders, Italian Americans for Indigenous Peoples Day