

Statement in Support of Indigenous Peoples Day in Holyoke, MA

I write on behalf of United American Indians of New England and the statewide Indigenous Peoples Day campaign, IndigenousPeoplesDayMA.org, to express our support for the efforts in Holyoke to replace Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples Day. I founded the statewide effort to bring Indigenous Peoples Day (IPD) to Massachusetts and have worked in multiple towns and cities to advise and help bring forward Indigenous Peoples Day resolutions. More and more cities and towns across the Commonwealth have chosen to make this change, from Nantucket to Marblehead to Cambridge to Easthampton.

I would prefer to speak with you, but am submitting this testimony in writing because you are only allowing 90 seconds for spoken testimony. It is not possible to explain in 90 seconds about the genocidal actions of Columbus and why we need Indigenous Peoples Day in place of Columbus Day.

Nearly all of us were falsely taught that “Columbus discovered America.” Indigenous people were not discovered by anybody since we were already here and were certainly not lost. We did not need to have civilization or spirituality brought to us, since we already had many civilizations and beliefs. We had and have the inherent right to continue to live in our own ways on our own lands.

Columbus’s policies on the islands where he landed, including slave labor, starvation, sex trafficking, and slaughter, resulted in the near-complete genocide of the Indigenous peoples of Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, and other places where the Spanish invaded. Altogether, Columbus shipped approximately 5,000 enslaved Indigenous Peoples across the Atlantic—filling his pockets and setting the stage for the TransAtlantic slave trade and the enslavement of millions of African as well as Indigenous people.

The brutality of his actions would reverberate through all the other invasions to come and the tens of millions of deaths that would follow. What happened is not a matter of interpretation. When people nowadays try to say that Columbus was not so bad, he was simply a product of his times, all you have to do is read the firsthand accounts of some of his contemporaries such as the priest Bartolome de las Casas, who came to be horrified by all that he saw.

We have been asking for IPD to be recognized everywhere in order to educate the public about Columbus and also – even more important -- to educate the public about the Indigenous past and present of where they live. We want to stop the harm that is done to our communities and

especially our children by the continued glorification of Columbus and marginalization of Indigenous peoples.

Celebrating Columbus erases centuries of Indigenous reality; it erases the decimation of Taino, Arawak, and many other peoples. It is an effort to silence us, to make us invisible. It has a terrible impact not only on our kids, but frankly it has a terrible impact on non-Native people to pretend it is all right to continue to do this.

Indigenous Peoples Day brings something positive in place of Columbus Day! It changes the conversation from Columbus to Indigenous history and our resilient cultures and continuing presence on our lands.

An important aspect of Indigenous Peoples Day is for non-Native people to learn to listen to Indigenous voices. I believe that the only way we can try to address climate collapse and seek any measure of climate justice is for Indigenous peoples' experience and leadership to be respected. Native peoples have been warning about climate change for a really long time. Non-Native people have unfortunately not listened sufficiently because of the ways in which our voices and knowledge have been dismissed, erased and belittled for centuries. Celebrating Indigenous Peoples Day can be an important first step in this regard and, we believe, will more properly reflect the values of the city of Holyoke.

Thank you.

Mahtowin Munro for UAINE and IndigenousPeoplesDayMA.org