

HB-1031 Repeal Columbus Day

Testimony 3.3.20

Senator Linda Newell

Senators, I come before you today, not as a former state senator, but as an interfaith chaplain and seminary student studying Social Justice and Ethics at Iliff School of Theology on Arapaho and Cheyenne land.

Although I used to pride myself on the work I did while I was among you, today, I come in humility, asking for your aye vote for HB-1031 Repealing Columbus Day holiday in Colorado.

From the Native community here, my American Indian studies, and the Native American Justice Council in seminary, I have learned accurate histories you and I were not taught in school. Histories some of which you have heard today (perhaps for the first time) -- mass killing, slave trade, and sex trafficking led by an alleged American hero whom we still honor in the State of Colorado today.

I have also learned about the psycho-social emotional harm that still exists today caused by holidays such as this one. As a student in pastoral care and chaplaincy, I have learned of and witnessed some of the intergenerational effects of historical trauma of the Indigenous communities in our state. Layered on top of that, is the current trauma being imposed on them unnecessarily every year BY US -- policymakers who (maybe unknowingly) sustain the continual honoring of a man who has led such violent harm against their peoples.

\*Can we imagine a scenario of an Adolf Hitler holiday where Jewish folks were being cruelly reminded of the leader of their ancestors' genocide? This is akin to what we are doing to the Indigenous peoples in Colorado every year.

**HB20-1031 Repeal Columbus Day in Colorado**  
**Sens. Williams & Hansen/Reps. Benavidez & Mullica**  
**With 20 House Co-Sponsors**

**WHAT HB-1031 (as amended) WILL DO:**

- This bill will repeal Colorado's designation of Columbus Day as a state holiday and replace it with Cabrini Day. The conception of Cabrini Day is a compromise collaboration between leaders in the Indigenous communities, Italian communities, and anti-racist stakeholders.
- Colorado will join a growing movement across the country to re-understand the history of the United States and minimize trauma to Indigenous peoples throughout the state.

**WHY:**

- Nationally, only 22 out of 50 states still observe Columbus Day.** As of 2016, Denver, Durango, and Boulder no longer observe the holiday.
- Christopher Columbus did not "discover" what is now known as the Americas. He never set foot in what is now known as the United States but landed in the Bahamas.** By 1492, as many as 100 million Indigenous people were already living in the Western Hemisphere.
- Before his invasion of the Western Hemisphere, **Columbus was a slave trader** for Portugal. He enslaved Indigenous Peoples from Western Africa and the Western Hemisphere, and later initiated the first Trans-Atlantic slave trade.
- Within three years of Columbus' invasion, five million out of eight million Taino people died.** Only 100,000 Taino people remained by the time of his departure. Within 50 years of his invasion, only 200 Taino people remained.
- Columbus was guilty of a number of gruesome genocidal crimes** during his invasion of the Western Hemisphere:
  - Columbus and his followers "Grabbed suckling infants by the feet, and, ripping them from their mothers' breasts, and dashed them headlong against the rocks."
  - They hunted Indigenous people with war-dogs, used the bodies of Indigenous people in the Caribbean as dog food, and fed live babies to the dogs.
  - His soldiers routinely laid wagers on whether they could manage to slice a man in two at a stroke, cut an individual's head from his body, or disembowel him with a single blow of their axes.
  - Columbus implemented a policy that included cutting off the hands of those who did not bring his invading force enough gold.
  - They raped Indigenous people and sold them as sex slaves. In 1500, Columbus said, "A hundred Castellanos are as easily obtained for a woman as for a farm . . . and there are plenty of dealers who go about looking for girls; those from nine to ten are now in demand."
- The existence of Columbus Day in Colorado signifies the state condones Columbus' heinous actions against the Indigenous peoples and unnecessarily continues emotional harm to them. It is time we clarify the accurate history and reduce the continuing trauma.**
- The Transform Columbus Day Alliance, an international coalition of over 80 organizations, has advocated for the repeal of Columbus Day in Colorado since 1989.** Legislatively, the coalition has attempted to replace Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples Day, Election Day, Colorado Day, and a floating holiday - each of which has failed. **This is the compromise that has been agreed upon.**
- The Fiscal Note determines that there is NO need for an Appropriation.**

Source citations available.