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## House of Representatives Washington, DC 20515

May 4, 2021

Meisha Porter  
Chancellor  
New York City Board of Education  
52 Chambers St, Room 320  
New York, New York 10007

Dear Chancellor Porter,

It has come to my attention that the New York City Department of Education will be replacing its Columbus Day remembrance with "Indigenous People's Day/Italian American Heritage Day." I do not support the removal or replacement of Columbus Day.

I respectfully request information as to the process used to arrive at this decision.

As you are aware, Columbus Day has its roots in New York City. In 1792, the Society of St. Tammany, or the Columbian Order, organized a tricentennial celebration of Columbus's landing in the New World. Italian immigrants in New York picked up Columbus Day as a celebration of their ethnic heritage and played a major role in the declaration of Columbus Day as a federal holiday in 1968.

The symbolism of Columbus Day is deeply personal for many Italian-Americans, including myself. My father, an Italian immigrant, faced tremendous discrimination because of Mussolini in WWII and the mafia stereotypes.

When asked in his 1939 high school yearbook what his goals in life were, he wrote that his goal was "to be a real American." My father served as a navigator on a B-24 in WWII and returned home to attend Harvard Law School on the GI bill. "What a country," he would exclaim, but despite graduating from the best school in the country, no NYC law firm would hire him. He fought discrimination and stereotypes his whole life and went on to live a great American success story.

When I was in school, learning about Columbus and the Nina, the Pinta, and the Santa Maria, I felt no similar discrimination. The Columbus holiday has helped Italian Americans overcome discrimination in our country. As an Italian American, I now feel a great obligation to fight discrimination against any people. I have devoted much of my public service to speaking out against it. Replacing Columbus Day is not the way to do it.

Columbus is honored for his courage, his perseverance and determination, and the adventurous risk-taking spirit that we as Americans aspire to.

For the 400th Anniversary of Columbus's voyage, President Benjamin Harrison urged citizen participation in commemorative services and the organization of programs by schools. That National Public School Celebration of Columbus Day in 1892 was also the rollout of the Pledge of Allegiance. Since that day, Columbus

Day's role has been cemented as a day of pride and recognition for Italian-Americans who wanted, in the face of discrimination on their nationality and the Catholic religion, to be "Real Americans," fully a part of this wonderful melting pot of a city-and-country.

Columbus Day has a rich history in New York City, in our public schools, and in the Italian-American community. I strongly urge that it not be removed or replaced.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas R. Suozzi". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent initial 'T'.

Thomas R. Suozzi

Member of Congress