

*City of Alexandria, Virginia*

**MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** JULY 12, 2019

**TO:** THE HONORABLE MAYOR, MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL

**FROM:** COUNCILMAN MO SEIFELDEIN & VICE MAYOR ELIZABETH BENNETT-PARKER

**SUBJECT:** INDIGENOUS PEOPLE'S DAY

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Alexandria's history is one of its many attractions and we shall continue to celebrate it and protect it. While it is crucial to recognize the contributions European explorers and the founding fathers have made, it is equally important to understand that places like Alexandria were home to many Indigenous people, commonly known as Native Americans, for thousands of years. Before Alexandria was a crucial port city for colonial America, it was a center of trade for Native Americans. At the time of European contact, there were several established villages of the Doeg tribe nearby including Assaomeck, Namassingakent, and Tauxenent. Today there are seven federally recognized tribes in Virginia - the Chickahominy, Eastern Chickahominy, Upper Mattaponi, Rappahannock, Nansemond and Monacan tribes. The purpose of this memo is to ask for your support to rebrand Columbus Day as Indigenous People's Day.

Renaming Columbus Day to Indigenous People's Day would provide an opportunity to acknowledge the overlooked history of oppression and the decimation of Native Americans. This would be a crucial step towards balancing the existing dominant historical narrative, which utilizes the term "New World," to refer to a land that was inhabited by Indigenous people for an estimated 12,000 years prior to Columbus's arrival in 1492. At the time, approximately 10 million Native Americans were living on the continent. Forty years after contact with Europeans, the Native population shrunk by two-thirds due to contact with diseases, land conflicts, and other factors. By 1900, this number was reduced to fewer than 300,000.

Many Indigenous people were responsible for the success of Europeans in America, which led to the survival of colonized lands in Virginia and the continent. Columbus Day is not a per se celebration of America's foundation and our principles, which are celebrated through the Fourth of July and George Washington's Birthday. As a result, we are proposing that the City of Alexandria, Virginia, acknowledges the contribution, hospitality, and the plight of Native Americans by renaming Columbus Day to Indigenous People's Day.

Many cities, states, and universities have already changed Columbus Day to Indigenous People's Day to commemorate Indigenous contributions to America<sup>1</sup>. This rebranding will not impact the existing federal

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<sup>1</sup> In 1994, Berkeley, California became the first city to rename Columbus Day as Indigenous People's Day. Since then, more than 130 other cities across the country have done the same, including: Seattle; Minneapolis; Denver; Los Angeles; Cincinnati; Atlanta; Nashville; Madison; Salt Lake City; Austin; Tulsa; Phoenix; San Francisco, which

or city holiday, and will still occur on the second Monday in October, the only difference being a cause for celebration of Native Americans. Recognition of the Native American communities through this holiday would celebrate Indigenous culture and contributions as well as highlight the ongoing struggles Indigenous Americans face. We ask for your support in having staff draft a resolution to this effect and ask you to engage the community regarding this matter.

cc: Mark Jinks, City Manager  
Joanna Anderson, City Attorney  
Gloria Sitton, City Clerk  
Human Rights Commission  
Gretchen Bulova, Office of Historic Alexandria

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was the first city to celebrate Columbus Day; and many more, along with the states of Alaska, Maine, Minnesota, Oregon, New Mexico, North Carolina, South Dakota and Vermont. Within the Commonwealth of Virginia, the towns of Charlottesville and Dumfries, along with Virginia Tech, have made this change.