

TO: State, Veterans & Military Affairs Committee
FROM: Alison Haugen
RE: HB 16-1135 Testimony
DATE: April 25, 2016

Mr. Chair, Members of the Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to present today.

My name is Alison Haugen; I am a dual degree student at the University of Denver's Sturm College of Law and Graduate School of Social Work. I am here to support House Bill 1135, *Concerning the renaming of the Columbus Day Holiday to Indigenous Peoples' Day*. I became familiar with this bill through my social policy class last quarter by researching the history of Columbus Day and its relation to Colorado.

I am where I am today, in part due to Columbus' impact on my life. I grew up in Minnesota, and like Colorado, Minnesota has a significant American Indian population. And, like most children across the country, I was taught the simple rhyme, "In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue." I was taught that Columbus "discovered America," that Columbus and the Native population were fast friends.

It was not until I was 9th grade that I learned the truth. As part of my U.S. history class, I participated in a mock trial where we put Christopher Columbus on trial for crimes against humanity. Contrary to the fairytale I was told as a child, Columbus did not "discover" America, Columbus was not "friends" with the Indigenous Peoples. Columbus was not a hero. Columbus enslaved. Columbus raped. Columbus tortured. Columbus murdered. Rooting out this truth helped set me on the path to law school.

When I went to college, I discovered that other students did not have the same progressive education that I had received and they continued to honor Christopher Columbus. So, what is appalling to me is that every single year children in this country are indoctrinated with the message that Columbus was a hero, an explorer, someone to idolize. Yet, we know this is not true. The evidence is clear. Columbus did not sail to the Indies to make friends.

Somehow, even though the Spanish Crown stripped Columbus of his title when he returned, the United States, a land Columbus never even set foot in, has celebrated his arrival for 524 years.

On the 300th anniversary of Columbus' discovery, it was heralded as "the greatest event in the history of mankind since the death of our Savior." The 400th Anniversary included a yearlong celebration. Now you might think that this continuity encourages leaving Columbus Day well enough alone. But, I'm sure you know what else was happening 300 years after Columbus' arrival. Full-blown slavery, women as property, witch-hunts. 400 years later? Jim Crow. The Wounded Knee Massacre. 2 years before the 400th anniversary of Columbus' arrival, 300 Lakota men, women, and children were killed in the final military blow designed to subdue the Native population.

Is Columbus' legacy really what we want to continue to honor, march for, celebrate? No. No it is not. It is long-past time to honor the indigenous peoples of this country. It is long past time to honor their ingenuity, their resilience, their value to this country's foundation. The American Indian population in Colorado has been asking for this for generations. It's time to listen.

The last point I'd like to make is simple. This Bill, to rename Columbus Day as Indigenous Peoples' Day in the great state of Colorado, will cost nothing. There is no fiscal obligation to take the first step to right this 500 year wrong.

Thank you.