

H.119: An act relating to Indigenous Peoples' Day

Representative Brian Cina

February 15, 2019

We are living on an ancient land that has been home to Indigenous Peoples for thousands of years. Our state and nation grew out of this sacred soil, these rocks, these rivers, these valleys and these mountains. The story of this continent is like a delicately woven basket, a complex history of interactions between various Indigenous peoples and people who came here from other places. This rich history is evident today by the names of natural landmarks and places, such as: Missisquoi- "where there is flint," Winooski- "wild onion land," Connecticut- "long tidal river," Memphramagog- "where there is a big expanse of water."

This history plays out in our foods, many which were cultivated by Indigenous people of the Americas, such as corn, tomatoes, potatoes, wild rice, pumpkins, cranberries, peanuts, and maple syrup. Indigenous people taught Europeans how to hunt and grow food, they shared knowledge about plant medicines, they served as guides, they fought for the Nation's independence and have served in every war since then, they have contributed and continue to contribute to American society on every level. Many Americans have traces of indigenous blood running through their veins and Indigenous genes in every cell of their body, and many Americans celebrate and practice their Indigenous culture and values, which have survived through disease, war, genocide, eugenics, and many methods of cultural oppression. Indigenous contributions to our state and nation have not been given proper recognition, and instead have been erased or revised as part of colonization. As our society considers ways to work towards reconciliation, it is important to make space for the celebration of Indigenous People.

There are many places that have created an Indigenous Peoples' Day. At last count, there were sixty cities and schools that have officially replaced the day. South Dakota has a separate "Native American Day." Alaska has an "Indigenous Peoples' Day," but never had Columbus Day. There are currently 5 states with active Indigenous Peoples' Day bills: Maine, New Mexico, Montana, New Hampshire, Kansas. For the past 3 years, both Governor Scott and Governor Shumlin proclaimed Indigenous Peoples' Day on Columbus Day. It is time for us to make a permanent change. No state legislature has made this change yet, let Vermont be a leader yet again.