New Jersey Italian and Italian American Heritage Commission Founding Legislation — P.L. 2001, Chapter 343

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Chapter 4. Article 4. (New) Italian Heritage Cultural and Educational Programs §§1-5 - C.18A:4-42 to 18A:4-46 §6 - Approp. – LIV P.L. 2001, CHAPTER 343, approved January 5, 2002Assembly, No. 3693 (First Reprint)

An Act establishing the New Jersey Commission on Italian and Americans of Italian Heritage Culture and Education Cultural and Educational Programs, supplementing chapter 4 of Title 18A of the New Jersey Statutes, and making an appropriation.

Be It Enacted by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:

- The Legislature finds and declares that:
- For the past several decades Hollywood and the communications media have continuously portrayed Italians and Americans of Italian Heritage as mobsters, buffoons and other nefarious characters to such an extent that it appears to be an orchestrated program of cultural dismemberment and disdain which can and will promote ethnic bigotry and loss of cultural identity.
- The exposure of our children and others to this unrelenting barrage of negative images has led to the erosion and denigration of Italian-American culture, history and heritage. It has, furthermore, encouraged children to emulate negative role models and promoted the social acceptability of disrespect for and bigotry towards Italians and Americans of Italian Heritage and their culture, history and heritage--a culture, history and heritage shared by over 22 percent of New Jersey's population.
- The histories of our nation and our State have been significantly enriched by the heritage of Italians and Americans of Italian Heritage. The cultural heritage of Italy includes the classical civilization of Rome, the fine arts of the Renaissance, the scientific and artistic genius of Da Vinci, the literary works of Dante and Petrarch, the operas of Verdi and Puccini and many other contributions that have ennobled civilization.
- More than 5.4 million Italians emigrated to the United States between the years 1820 and 1991; today more than 2 million citizens of this State are of Italian descent. Our nation and our State have benefited substantially from the influences and contributions of these men, women and children and their distinctive culture, history and heritage.
- It is desirable to educate our citizens about the positive aspects of the culture, music, art, language, history and heritage of Italians and Americans of Italian Heritage.
- It is the policy of the State of New Jersey that the culture, history and heritage of Italians and Americans of Italian Heritage are a proper concern for all people, particularly students enrolled in the schools of this State.
- It is appropriate and desirable that programs, workshops, institutes, seminars and other teacher-training activities for the study of the culture, history and heritage of Italians and Americans of Italian Heritage be conducted at the various high schools and institutions of higher education in this State.
- It is fitting and proper to establish a permanent State-level commission to survey, design, encourage and promote the implementation of Italian and Americans of Italian Heritage cultural and educational programs in this State, with responsibility for the coordination of events that will provide appropriate awareness and memorialization of

the culture, history, heritage and language of Italians and Americans of Italian Heritage on a regular basis throughout the State.

2.

- The New Jersey Commission on Italian and Americans of Italian Heritage Cultural and Educational Programs is created and established in the Executive Branch of the State Government. For the purposes of complying with the provisions of Article V, Section IV, paragraph 1 of the New Jersey Constitution, the commission is allocated within the Department of Education, but notwithstanding this allocation, the commission shall be independent of any supervision or control by the department 1[of] or any board or officer thereof. The commission shall consist of 21 members, including the Commissioner of Education and the chair of the executive board of the Presidents' Council, serving ex officio, and 19 public members. Public members shall be appointed as follows: five public members shall be appointed by the President of the Senate, at least one of whom shall have a Masters' degree in an area of Italian studies or language; five public members shall be appointed by the Speaker of the General Assembly , at least one of whom shall have a Masters' degree in an area of Italian studies or language; and nine public members shall be appointed by the Governor, no less than [six] four of whom shall at the time of their appointment have at least a Masters' degree in an area of Italian studies or language. The public members shall be residents of the State who have served prominently as spokespersons for, or as leaders of, organizations in the Italian and Americans of Italian Heritage community which serve members of religious, ethnic, national Heritage or social groups or who are experienced in the field of Italian and Americans of Italian Heritage education. To the greatest extent practicable, they shall be chosen with due regard to afford the commission with broad regional representation and ethnic diversity. At least one-half of the public members shall be of Italian descent.

- Each public member of the commission shall serve for a term of three years, except that of the initial members so appointed: one member appointed by the President of the Senate, one member appointed by the Speaker of the General Assembly and two members appointed by the Governor shall serve for terms of one year; two members appointed by the President of the Senate, two members appointed by the Speaker of the General Assembly and three members appointed by the Governor shall serve for terms of two years; and two members appointed by the President of the Senate, two members appointed by the Speaker of the General Assembly and four members appointed by the Governor shall serve for terms of three years. Public members shall be eligible for reappointment. They shall serve until their successors are appointed and qualified, and the term of the successor of any incumbent shall be calculated from the expiration of the term of that incumbent. A vacancy occurring other than by expiration of term shall be filled in the same manner as the original appointment, but for the unexpired term only.

- The members of the commission shall serve without compensation, but they shall be entitled to reimbursement for all necessary expenses incurred in the performance of their duties.

- The commission annually shall elect a chairman from among its members. It shall meet upon the call of the chairman or of a majority of the commission members. The presence of a majority of the authorized membership of the commission shall be required for the conduct of official business.

- The commission shall appoint an executive director, who shall serve at its pleasure and shall be a person qualified by training and experience to perform the duties of the office.

- The commission shall have the following responsibilities and duties:

- To provide, based upon the collective knowledge and experience of its members, assistance and advice to the public and nonpublic schools of this State with respect to the implementation of Italian and Americans of Italian Heritage cultural and educational programs;

- To meet with county and local school officials and other interested public and private organizations, for the purpose of assisting with the planning, coordination or modification of courses of study dealing with issues, matters and subjects concerning or relating to the culture, history and heritage of Italians and Americans of Italian Heritage;
- To survey and catalog the extent and breadth of Italian and Americans of Italian Heritage cultural awareness and educational programs presently being incorporated into the curricula and taught in the school systems of this State; to inventory those Italian and Americans of Italian Heritage exhibits and resources which may be incorporated into courses of study at various locations throughout the State and, upon request, to assist the State Department of Education and other educational agencies in the development and implementation of Italian and Americans of Italian Heritage cultural awareness and educational programs. In furtherance of this responsibility, the commission shall be authorized to contact and cooperate with existing Italian and Americans of Italian Heritage public or private nonprofit resource organizations and may act as a liaison concerning issues and topics involving and relating to the culture, history and heritage of Italians and Americans of Italian Heritage to members of the United States Senate and House of Representatives and the New Jersey Senate and General Assembly;
- To compile a roster of individual volunteers who are willing to share their knowledge and experience in classrooms, seminars and workshops on subjects concerning and relating to the culture, history and heritage of Italians and Americans of Italian Heritage. These volunteers may be scholars, clergymen, community relations professionals and other persons who, by virtue of their experience, training or interest, have acquired personal or academic knowledge of the culture, history and heritage of Italians and Americans of Italian Heritage and who are willing to share that knowledge with students and teachers;
- To coordinate events observing the culture, history and heritage of Italians and Americans of Italian Heritage and to seek volunteers who are willing and able to participate in commemorative events that will enhance student awareness of the significance of the culture, history and heritage of Italians and Americans of Italian Heritage;
- To prepare reports for the Governor and the Legislature regarding its findings and recommendations to facilitate the inclusion of Italian and Americans of Italian Heritage studies and special programs memorializing the culture, history and heritage of Italians and Americans of Italian Heritage in the educational system of this State; and
- To develop, in consultation with the State Department of Education, curriculum guidelines for the teaching of subjects and topics concerning and relating to the culture, history and heritage of Italians and Americans of Italian Heritage. To the greatest extent practicable, each board of education shall incorporate those guidelines as part of the curriculum for its district's elementary and secondary school students.

4.

- The commission is authorized to call upon any department, office, division or agency of the State, or of any county, municipality of school district of the State, to supply such data, program reports and other information, personnel and assistance as it deems necessary to discharge its responsibilities under this act.
- These departments, offices, divisions and agencies shall, to the extent possible, and not inconsistent with any other law of this State, cooperate with the commission and shall furnish it with such information, personnel and assistance as may be necessary or helpful to accomplish the purposes of this act.

15.

- The commission shall create, establish and oversee the Institute of Italian and Italian American Heritage Studies as an entity whose purpose is to assist the commission in implementation of its responsibilities as identified in section 3 of this act, P.L., c. (C.) (now pending before the Legislature as this bill). The commission shall function as the board of governors for the institute. The commission shall appoint an executive director of the institute

who shall serve at its pleasure.

- The commission shall survey the New Jersey four-year universities and colleges that have an advanced degree program in the fields of Italian and/or Italian American studies and select one to serve as host to the institute. The institute shall not be administered by the college or university selected as the host site. The institute will collaborate with and otherwise engage, share and exchange resources with the higher education community of New Jersey and work to establish mutually beneficial public service programs and activities consistent with the mission of the commission.
- The institute shall have the authority to raise private funds and obtain public funds to be used towards scholarships, grants and studies in the field of Italian and/or Italian American studies.
- The commission shall appoint an Advisory Council to the commission and institute. The advisory council shall consist of individuals who have served prominently as spokespersons for, or as leaders of, organizations in the Italian and Americans of Italian Heritage community which serve members of religious, ethnic, national heritage or social groups or who are experienced in the field of Italian and Americans of Italian Heritage education.

1[5.] 6.1 There is appropriated from the General Fund 2[$350,000] $250,0002 to the Department of Education to enable the Commission on Italian and Americans of Italian Heritage [Culture and Education] Cultural and Educational Programs to effectuate the purposes of this act.

1[6.] 7.1 This act shall take effect immediately.

Establishes Commission on Italian and Americans of Italian Heritage Cultural and Educational Programs; appropriates $350,000.