

# CONFERENCE of PRESIDENTS of Major Italian American Organizations

## Landmark Civil Rights Lawsuit Filed by Major Italian American Organizations in a Show of National Unity

### PRESS RELEASE

When: Tuesday, April 6th, 2021

What: Federal Civil Rights Lawsuit filed against Mayor James F. Kenney and the City of Philadelphia

Who: Plaintiffs are The Conference Of Presidents Of Major Italian American Organizations, Philadelphia Councilmember Mark F. Squilla, and The 1492 Society

Where: Suit has been filed in the United States District Court, Eastern District of Pennsylvania

Why: On January 27, 2021, Mayor Kenney by "Executive Order" No. 2-21 unilaterally canceled "Columbus Day" as a holiday in Philadelphia, and replaced it with "Indigenous Peoples Day." No notice was given to the other branches of the Philadelphia Government which had a right to designate holidays, no input from the public was requested or allowed for, and no deference was given to State Statute (44 P.S. Section 32) declaring "Columbus Day" as an official statewide holiday, all in violation of the Philadelphia Home Rule Charter. More importantly, Mayor Kenney's Executive Order is the latest in a long pattern of discrimination against the Italian American Community in Philadelphia (including the toppling

in the middle of the night of the Rizzo Statue and the boxing up the Columbus Statue in Marconi Plaza), and violates the U.S. Constitution's guarantee of "Equal Protection" against governmental discrimination.

Basil Russo, the President of the Conference of Presidents (consisting of the respective Presidents of major Italian American organizations throughout the Country) said: "We as Italian Americans believe that each and every ethnic group deserves the opportunity to celebrate its heritage and historical achievements. We also believe it is a violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution to allow one ethnic group the right to do so (Indigenous People), while denying another group the right to celebrate its heritage (Italian Americans), as Mayor Kenney chose to do. This lawsuit, supported by major Italian American organizations throughout our Country, is intended to guarantee ALL ethnic groups the opportunity to celebrate their individual and distinct heritages and historic accomplishments in a spirit of mutual respect."

Councilmember Mark F. Squilla added: "Upon learning that the Columbus Day Holiday was changed, I immediately reached out to Mayor Kenney for an understanding of his decision process, but never received a response. As a City of immigrants, we need to celebrate all ethnicities and their contributions to Philadelphia and our country. I am disappointed that Mayor Kenney removed a holiday that celebrated Italian American heritage, without a process. Indigenous people are deserving of a day to celebrate their culture and contributions to the City and nation. However, this change has created tension between two immigrant populations, rather than promoting inclusivity and citywide reforms that serve all of our diverse communities that will encourage unity, not division."

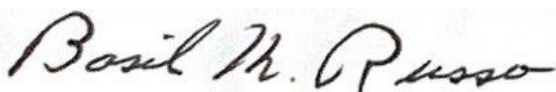
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## Italian Americans Seek Equal Treatment Under Federal Law

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**President Basil M. Russo**

*Conference of Presidents of Major Italian American Organizations*

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*This initiative is sponsored by Italian Sons and Daughters of America, ISDA; National Italian American Foundation, NIAF; National Organization of Italian American Women, NOIAW; Order Sons and Daughters of Italy in America, OSIA; and UNICO National.*

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