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## **Testimony in Support of HB895: Indigenous Peoples' Day - Rule of Interpretation and Replacement of Columbus Day**

Health and Government Operations Committee  
March 12, 2020

Dear Chair Pendergrass and Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee:

The Asian American Student Union (AASU) at the University of Maryland, College Park is writing in support of HB895. AASU was originally founded as the Asian Student Union in 1990 by Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) students on campus who valued advocacy, identity-building, and heritage remembrance as guiding tenets of an organization. These principles are codified in our organization's constitution, which deems the purpose of AASU as "to provide service, representation and advocacy for the AAPI community at the University of Maryland." Since its founding, AASU has helped to create UMD's Asian American Studies Program, held workshops and conferences on AAPI identity, and engaged in political advocacy on various AAPI issues. We exist today because of this history of struggle, and thus acknowledge the ways in which our forebears have granted us the ability to lead in campus, social, and political change.

We, the Asian American Student Union, stand in solidarity with our native and indigenous brothers and sisters. In this regard, we acknowledge the similarities between our community and theirs i.e., the subjugation and displacement of peoples and groups. Just as the history of the Asian Diaspora is inextricably tied to colonialist invasion and forced and/or voluntary migrations from our homelands, the Native American past is also molded by similar forces of conquest and othering. Our collective histories are thus burdened by and inextricably tied to Western hegemony, exploitation, and whitewashing. As such, we assert that the advancement of any group is incomplete without the advancement of all.

This bill will neither erase nor resolve the brutality, oppression, displacement, and marginalization that has long defined the Native American past. However, it is an important step in combating the selective amnesia that has since dominated our understanding of American history. Changing the name of a holiday may come across as merely symbolic, but it is not simply a petty debate over labels. Replacing Columbus Day inherently reclaims and reinvests in the power and potential of indigenous Americans — to disavow *their* colonizers, elevate *their* oppressed, honor *their* dead, restore *their* dignity, empower *their* communities, rewrite *their* history, and reposition *themselves* as the leaders of *their* futures. May this bill serve as an injunction of erasure.

**We thus strongly urge a favorable report on HB895.**