



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jeffrey D. Klein

## Senator Jeff Klein Collects over 1,000 Signatures to Save Columbus Statue at Morris Park Columbus Day Parade; Petition Drive will Continue for Two Weeks

JEFFREY D. KLEIN October 8, 2017

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*Senators Klein & Savino, Assembly Members Gjonaj & Benedetto, Italian-American leaders & parade-goers rally to save cultural symbol at Morris Park Columbus Day Parade*

**Bronx, NY —** Senator Jeff Klein (D-Bronx/Westchester), joined by Senator Diane Savino (D-SI/Brooklyn), Assemblyman Mark Gjonaj (D-Bronx), Assemblyman Michael Benedetto (D-Bronx), Italian-American community leaders and Columbus Day parade-goers, sent a strong message

to the city: leave the statue of Christopher Columbus at Columbus Circle alone.

Senator Klein led a petition drive at stations along the route named after Columbus' ships — the Nina, the Pinta and the Santa Maria — collecting over 1,000 signatures in support of keeping the 75-foot high statue standing. The petition drive will continue for two weeks and then the signatures will be sent to the city's commission reviewing public art.

"It is offensive to tear down an important part of Italian-American history in New York City and we will not stand for it. The statue of Christopher Columbus represents the Italian immigrants' voyage to New York City at a time when the group faced rampant discrimination. New York City presented immense opportunities and this statue was a gift, and remains symbolic to the entire Italian-American community. We will fight to make sure this symbol of Italian-American success and pride is not taken down," **said Senator Klein.**

"Italian-Americans have a history of giving back to this city, and that's what that statue represents: a contribution to the city of New York from Italian immigrants. They scraped together pennies from their pockets so they could contribute to the effort to give a gift to a city that had opened up the doors of opportunity for them," **said Senator Savino.**

"As a celebration of Italian American heritage and their invaluable contribution to who we are as a nation, the statue represents the Italian community's spirit of hope, aspiration and discovery that is uniquely American. It is with that spirit that I will proudly stand with my colleagues as we honor the values of community, family and hard work," **said Assemblyman Gjonaj.**

"This is a clear example of a 'the sky is falling mentality.' Everyone is rushing around trying to topple all statutes in sight. We need to accept the good and bad part of our heritage without trying to sugarcoat anything. Sanity and reason must return," **said Assemblyman Benedetto.**

“Christopher Columbus is a hero to the Italian-American community. He was the first immigrant to these shores. His voyage made way to millions of immigrants to land on these shores. He should remain to be celebrated rather than vilified,” **said John Fratta, New York State Commission for Social Justice Chairman.**

In its 41st year, the Morris Park Columbus Day Parade is the second largest in the state. This year's kick-off drew the ire of elected officials, Italian-American leaders, community members who want the statue of Christopher Columbus to stand.

At a time when Italian immigrants faced discrimination, *Il Progresso*, an Italian language newspaper, raised funds to erect the marble artwork as a gift to New York City where Italians found opportunity.

It is seen as a cultural symbol of the Italian-American experience in New York.