



Joint Civic Committee of Italian Americans

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Joint Civic Committee of Italian Americans to file suit against Chicago Park District

CHICAGO: Just three days shy of the one-year anniversary of the removal of three Christopher Columbus monuments, the Joint Civic Committee of Italian Americans (JCCIA) is filing a complaint in the Chancery Court of Cook County against the Chicago Park District in an effort to get the Arrigo Park statue put back at its original location. A press conference is scheduled for Thursday, July 22, 10 am at Arrigo Park, the "former" site of one of the Columbus Statues.

On July 24, 2020, it is believed that Mayor Lori Lightfoot ordered the removal of the three Columbus Statues claiming it as a safety measure during protests and civil unrest. It was to be "temporary," and the JCCIA's position is that a year is long enough.

"We have reached out to the Park District and to the city on several occasions, including a formal letter and ten-exhibit outline of our position, with no response from either," said JCCIA President Ron Onesti. "We have been respectful, communicative and resourceful. Their lack of response has made litigation unavoidable so as to protect the interests of Chicago's Italian American community."

On Tuesday of this week, without notice and after multiple requests from the JCCIA, the Chicago Park District removed the chain link fence Tuesday surrounding the base of the Arrigo Park Statue, placed there a year ago. "That's definitely a step in the right direction, albeit a small one," Onesti said.

The JCCIA has filed a one count complaint for specific performance of a contract executed between the Chicago Park District and the Columbus Statue Committee (JCCIA is the successor in interest to the Columbus Statue Committee) in October, 1973. The complaint does not seek monetary damages. It seeks to compel the Chicago Park District to perform its obligations under the terms of the contract. Specifically, to return the Christopher Columbus statue to Arrigo Park where it has stood since 1966.

The suit being filed by the JCCIA names the City of Chicago and Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot as "respondents in discovery" and not as defendants, as of yet.

Documents signed on October 10, 1973 clearly read, "Upon execution of this agreement, the (Chicago Park) DISTRICT will, in perpetuity, obtain the approval, in writing, of the COMMITTEE before making any substantial change to Columbus Plaza or Columbus Statue." What actually happened was a clear breach of that contract.

The principal signer of the contract was Edmund Kelly, General Superintendent of the Chicago Park District at the time. Kelly has long since retired but at 93, is still active in the community. "I was there," stated in a quote from Kelly. "That statue was put up to honor the Italian Americans who helped build this city. It was never meant to come down and should be put back immediately," he said.

Copies of the lawsuit will be distributed at a press conference scheduled for July 22nd 10 am at Arrigo Park, 801 South Loomis Street, Chicago.

The JCCIA is a 501c3 organization and the Congress of over fifty Italian American Organizations in the Chicago area.