

Testimony for SB 304 by Ryan Zhou, Favorable

Dear State delegates,

My name is Ryan Zhou. I'm a 9th grade student at Howard High School. I am the student representative for the AAPI Advisory Committee of the Howard County Public School System. I am here today to voice my support of Senate Bill 304, requiring the public schools in the State of Maryland to develop and incorporate units of Asian American history into their curriculum.

The population of the State of Maryland, and our nation as a whole, has become increasingly diverse, with the Asian population being the fastest growing group. However, I feel that my identity as an American is oftentimes not fully recognized.

Over the last summer, while my brother and I were visiting colleges, a young girl came up to us welcoming us to the U.S, even though my brother and I were born in the U.S, and have spent our entire lives here in Howard County, Maryland. Without even talking to us, the little girl had determined that we were foreigners, and that we didn't come from here. I'm sure the young girl was just trying to be friendly, but it shows that to her, and a lot of other Americans as well, we are viewed as perpetual foreigners. As a result, anti-Asian racism and hate-crimes have increased exponentially in the last two years. This is largely due to the lack of education on AAPI history. As a minority group, AAPI contributions to the U.S have long been ignored.

AAPI history is the part of American history. Asian Americans helped build America to where it is today, from the building of the transcontinental railroads in the 1860's, a key point to American westward expansion, to the most decorated army unit composed completely of Japanese Americans during WW2. Even more, Asian American has helped to shape the American legal system. In my recent NHD project, I studied the 1886 US Supreme Court case - Yick Wo v. Hopkins, in which the Chinese laundry owners sued the City of San Francisco over discrimination. This was the first case in U.S. history that established that all persons, regardless of their race and nationality, are guaranteed equal protection and due process of our laws. This case was cited more than 160 times in future Supreme Court opinions, leading to the interpretation of the 14th Amendment of our constitution to its current form.

However, all these contributions the Asian American has made to our country has been neglected. I strongly advocate that the Asian American history be included into our school curriculum. I feel that it is very important to teach students, especially at a young age, that Asian Americans are not foreigners but an integral part of American society.

I implore that all the state delegates here join our cause of making AAPI history part of the public school curriculum.