

SUSAN C. LEE
Legislative District 16
Montgomery County

MAJORITY WHIP

Judicial Proceedings Committee

Joint Committee on
Cybersecurity, Information Technology,
and Biotechnology

Chair Emeritus
Maryland Legislative Asian American
and Pacific Islander Caucus

President Emeritus
Women Legislators of the
Maryland General Assembly, Inc.



James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Room 223
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3124 · 301-858-3124
800-492-7122 Ext. 3124
Susan.Lee@senate.state.md.us

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 16, 2022

Senate Education Health and Environmental Affairs Committee
SB 462 – Favorable – Expanded American History

The history of America is incomplete without including the story of African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans & Pacific Islanders, Latinos, and Women who have made major contributions to building America, but are underrepresented or not fully depicted in our history books. Their sterling achievements, talent, dedication, and hard work, helped make our country a global leader in business, science, medicine, technology, education, sports, the arts, and just about every field, because of the diversity of experience and thought that they bring to the collective table of the United States of America. Our melting pot and immigrant communities not only are a part of our history, they truly define it.

Disease decimated indigenous communities to the point where entire cultures and civilizations perished before there was a European historian present to record their accomplishments. Much of what was recorded was the modern day equivalent of capturing their society in the aftermath of a zombie apocalypse. African Americans were not only brought to America by boat from Africa, but in Maryland they were harvested like crops to sell to the southern states where conditions were too harsh for families to grow as easily in the more seasonal tobacco harvesting. Slaves were illegal to import, but not trade domestically for many decades. Asian Americans not only experienced the Chinese Exclusion Act, but also Japanese Americans were subjected to internment camps as recently as World War II. In Maryland, when we became a state, you had to be a large property owner, who happened to be a white man with the protestant faith (even in a Catholic Colony) to run for the state legislature.

These are all lessons that either are or should be taught in schools. This legislation is not about mandating what they teach. Rather, the charge is merely to cover the groups of populations that are a part of the American fabric, but might need some fabric softener from all the

wrinkling over time. This is not about a whitewash of history, it is about making sure our colors don't fade.

Our American history is a collection of stories and achievements of individuals and groups striving for the pursuit of happiness in a nation derived on ideals of liberty and equality under law. However, those who read history fully know, it has taken a long time to live up to our founding ideals, and that struggle continues into the present. Without a solid and full grasp of history, we are doomed to repeat the mistakes of our past. That is why codifying the education about these neglected groups in our history should be a priority in Maryland law.

The murder of George Floyd, the recent 155% surge in hate crimes and violence against Asian Americans & Pacific Islanders, and the disparagement of women, immigrants, and people of color fueled by the toxic rhetoric by some of those in the highest office and trust have highlighted the importance of expanding the curriculum to include and better understand their experiences and to counter misinformation and stereotypes. This was the first bill I requested to be drafted, and after some consideration, we decided the appropriate groups to cover would include those for which Maryland has connections to directly in our legislative caucuses. We have a Women's caucus, Black, Latino, AAPI but we couldn't leave out Native Americans, or American Indians as they are referred to in the Education Article.

SB 462, which is cross filed with HB 47 sponsored by Delegate T.C. Wilson, simply and broadly provides that the State Board of Education develop content standards and frameworks in social studies to include "African Americans, American Indians, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, Hispanic Americans, Women and other Groups determined by the SBE." Each county board, in collaboration with local school boards and school systems would develop and implement age appropriate curriculum guides for expanded American history. This process is now more inclusive than as was drafted in last year's HB11, so local school systems and educators should have more say and of course parents are encouraged to be involved as well, but the curriculum itself is not mandated or micro-managed, we are simply proposing broad outlines, that are consistent with existing social studies standards. Codifying this is more important now than ever because school districts are under pressure and out of state money is being used to scare and intimidate against teaching broad history curriculum to account for neglected groups.

SB 462 is neither about critical race theory, nor telling students how to think, but rather about providing students with an understanding and history of people whose invaluable accomplishments have been marginalized or never told. Anyone who references CRT in opposition either hasn't read the bill or is trying to gaslight the state into submission. This law will provide educators and the school boards the cover they need to focus on the task at hand, educating our children with a fulsome view of our nation's history.

This legislation will not only help integrate their history into the mainstream, but also enable students, particularly girls and those from communities of color, to build pride and identity. In addition, as they will be our next generation leaders, SB 462 will provide our students with an accurate and more complete record of our nation's experiences to enable them to make

decisions on how to move forward. We need to flip the script on book banning, and hateful rhetoric. E Pluribus Unum – out of many one, but to understand the one, we must also understand the many groups that had to fight to get equal rights under law. That struggle and the accomplishments of the groups listed are models of American exceptionalism.

I would like to share my own personal experiences as a 3rd generation American women of Chinese descent born in San Antonio, Texas and raised most of life in Maryland. I was frequently made to feel like a foreigner in my own country, being the target of racial epithets, and told to go back to China. When I was in a young child in Texas, history classes rarely, if ever, included the significant contributions made by Latinos, Native Americans, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, but mostly highlighted the story of the defenders of the Alamo. There was also no mention of Juneteenth—a celebration of the day enslaved people in Texas learned they were free. When we moved to Maryland, there was little or no mention of the accomplishments of women or people of color in our history classes.

It was only until I was in college when I took elective courses did I learned about the tremendous part Chinese Americans played in building the railroads, the thousands of Chinese Americans, who served in the US Armed Forces during WWII despite facing overwhelming discrimination and the Chinese Exclusion Act- including my father who was born in San Antonio and served in the US Navy on the perilous Atlantic and Pacific; the 442th Regiment, one the most decorated in US Military history, composed of Japanese Americans whose families were interned in camps because of their race; and Dr. Chien-Shiung Wu, who was the First Lady of Physics. Our students would benefit from expanding their knowledge by learning about those individuals whose talent, sacrifices, and work changed the world, such as American and Maryland hero Harriet Tubman, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther, Jr., Rosa Parks, Congressman Elijah Cummings, Congressman John Lewis, and Wilma Mankiller; the courageous Tuskegee Airmen who defended freedom and the Navajo Code Talkers who created an unbreakable code during World War II; Dr. Charles Drew whose pioneer research in blood preservation saved countless lives; Dr. Steven Chu who received a Nobel Prize in Physics; Min Chueh Chang, who was the co-inventor of the combined oral contraceptive pill; Dennis Hong who revolutionize the robotics field; Fazlur Rahman Khan who was the father of the tubular design for high rises; Benjamin Banneker who was an astronomer, mathematician, and Almanac publisher and George Washington Carver who made advancements in agriculture; Jesse Owens, Jackie Robinson and Jim Thorpe who paved the way in integrating sports; Cesar Chavez and Delores Huerta who helped uplift the lives of farmworkers; and others who worked to fulfil the promise of America.

SB 462 will enrich our students' knowledge about America as a country that is unique and strong because of its rich diversity and all those things we share in common as Americans, particularly our love of freedom, justice, and country. Our collective history must include the history of groups that have been historically marginalized from our history itself.

For the reasons set forth, I respectfully request my colleagues vote favorably on HB 462.