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Testimony in **SUPPORT of Senate Bill 462**
Public Schools – Expanded American History –
Development of Content Standards and Implementation

Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee
February 16, 2022
1:00 PM ET

Presented to: Paul G. Pinsky, Chairman

By: **Phil Tajitsu Nash**, AAST Co-Founder and Adjunct Lecturer, former Smithsonian Curator,
and Co-President of the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF)

FAVORABLE

As a Co-founder and Member of the faculty of the Asian American Studies Program (AAST) as well as an Affiliate faculty member of the Latin American Studies Center (LASC) and the Harriet Tubman Department of Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies (WGSS) at the University of Maryland, **I urge a favorable report on SB 462.** This Bill would require the State Board of Education to work with local school systems to develop (by December 1, 2022) content standards for expanding the K-12 social studies curriculum to include the histories and contributions of African Americans, American Indians, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI), Hispanic Americans, Women, and other groups as determined by the State Board. By making a state-wide commitment to teaching this history, Maryland will be taking a nationally-recognized stand for inclusion and understanding -- and against the bigotry, hatred and violence that has been found too often in the history of our wonderful nation.

I am speaking here on behalf of the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, which strongly supports this bill, but not officially on behalf of AAST, LASC or WGSS.

I have taught Asian American History for 38 years at City College of New York, Yale University, and, for the last 26 years, at AAST here in College Park. I also have taught Study Abroad classes to bring college students to the Brazilian Amazon to learn about Indigenous communities, participated in the development of La Escuela Fratney (a two-way whole language Elementary School in Milwaukee), co-taught classes that looked at AAPI and African American histories side-by-side, and taught enrichment courses to Hispanic Americans at Aspira (a Hispanic American service and education group in New Jersey). As a Staff Attorney, Board Member and now Co-President of the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF), I have spent over 40 years participating in Asian American History

through projects such as the historic movement to redress Japanese Americans wrongfully interned behind barbed wire during World War II. As the Curator of the Asian Pacific American Program at the 2010 Smithsonian Folklife Festival, I led one of the nation's largest celebrations of Asian American History – with 1200 members of the local Asian American community entertaining millions of visitors on the National Mall and online during ten days of music, dance, storytelling, cooking, and other activities. As a community advocate, I have given thousands of speeches, trainings, classroom presentations, and informal talks to K-12, university, corporate, non-profit, military, and governmental audiences on many aspects of Asian American History.

Through these decades of activity, I have come to see the importance of education to build pride, counter misinformation, and combat stereotypes. This new curriculum mandated by **SB 462** should start by celebrating the successes of African Americans, American Indians, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI), Hispanic Americans, and Women. However, the full story of American History also includes two other parts: barriers that have held us back, and stories of those who overcame those barriers and, in the process, vindicated rights that are enjoyed today by people of all backgrounds.

Presenting American History in this three-part format will show us as human beings who have taken charge of our own lives and who are bettering society as a whole by standing up for our rights. It also shows history as a process that each of us can shape by our actions, not a one-dimensional snapshot that perpetuates stereotypes and misunderstandings.

By ensuring that this expanded American History is taught at least once during elementary, middle and high school, **SB 462** will go a long way toward vaccinating our state's children against the scourge of racial intolerance, and help them to grow up with the Cultural Competence Toolkit they need to be productive and effective participants in an increasingly interconnected world. Instead of walking on eggshells, Maryland children of every background will develop the confidence that comes from understanding those around them and working with them to build a sustainable world of peace, justice and understanding.

In sum, I want to thank you for your consideration, and **strongly urge a favorable report on SB 462.**