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Testimony in **SUPPORT of House Bill 922**
Education - Public Schools - Asian American History Curriculum Requirement

House Ways and Means Committee
February 25, 2022
12:00 PM ET

Presented to: Delegate Vanessa E. Atterbeary, Chair
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 member of the faculty of the Asian American Studies Program (AAST) at the University of Maryland and an expert in Asian American History, **I urge a favorable report on HB 922**, which would require the State Board of Education to develop curriculum materials on Asian American History for use in Maryland's public schools. Appropriately, this Bill allows local boards to determine the amount of instruction and implementation of these standards. However, by making a state-wide commitment to teaching this history, Maryland will be taking a nationally-recognized stand for inclusion and understanding - and against bigotry, hatred and anti-Asian American violence.

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.

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. 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.

I also have written hundreds of newspaper and scholarly articles on Asian American History topics, participated in the scholarly development of the field of Asian American Studies, and 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. In April, I have been invited by the President of the Association for Asian American Studies to serve on a plenary panel focusing on “The Next 50 Years of Asian American Studies.”

Through these many decades of activity, I have come to see the importance of education to build pride, counter misinformation, and combat stereotypes. Like immigrants from every shore, Asian Americans have come to this country to better ourselves, to raise families, to create communities, and to strengthen the “more perfect union” that is the United States. We have accepted the challenge to grow the crops, build the railroads, iron the shirts, and cook the meals. We have provided a disproportionate number of the nation’s nurses and doctors, as well as business and science professionals. Yet we also are represented on Broadway, in public school classrooms, on the baseball diamond, and behind the wheel of your taxi.

This new curriculum should start by celebrating the successes of Asian American individuals and communities. However, the full story of Asian 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 Asian 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 the kaleidoscope that it is, not a one-dimensional snapshot that paints us as Model Minorities or Perpetual Foreigners.

By ensuring that a unit of Asian American History is taught at least once during elementary, middle and high school, **HB 922** 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.

In sum, I want to thank you for your consideration, and **strongly urge a favorable report on HB 922.**