

February 23, 2022

House Bill HB0922

Education- Public Schools - Asian American History Curriculum Requirement

Written Testimony from Jamie Lok (Montgomery County, MD), Montgomery County Progressive Asian American Network (MoCoPAAN)

FAVORABLE

I am a Board Member of the Montgomery County Progressive Asian American Network (MoCoPAAN) and the parent of two children who attend public schools in the state. This testimony is in FAVOR of the proposed legislation.

MoCoPAAN's mission is to raise the visibility of Asian Americans, to collectivize and lift up progressive voices and to offer allyship through strategic communications. In so doing, MoCoPAAN works to demonstrate that Asian Americans have a multitude of voices. MoCoPAAN serves as a voice on issues that affect people of diverse backgrounds: representation, equity and inclusion; immigrant rights; and racial discrimination and profiling. MoCoPAAN carries out its mission through speaking engagements, community education, and advocacy.

MoCoPAAN members represent diverse backgrounds, including Chinese, Indian, Korean, Vietnamese, Japanese, Indonesian, Cambodian, and Filipino Americans; first and second generation immigrants; and MCPS students and parents in our county. Based on their years of experience with Asian American activism on the national level, MoCoPAAN leadership regularly engages in public engagement opportunities to educate the broader community on the role Asian Americans have played in shaping U.S. history along with other communities of color.

The spike in reported hate and violence directed at Asian Americans during the pandemic has made clear that more education on Asian Americans is needed. MoCoPAAN heard from students about the sense of fear and isolation. They expressed concerns about returning to school. Also, they said that they would've felt more supported in their learning environment if they had seen the Asian Americans' history, contributions and challenges represented in the curriculum, as well as diverse faculty and systems support.

Ensuring our public school curricula is inclusive is an important place to start that work. We must correct the absence of Asian American history in our schools so our children learn the full breadth of American history and are better prepared for a society of deep-rooted diversity. In general, ethnic studies exposure like that proposed in this bill is associated with positive learning outcomes in the K-12 public school context.ⁱ

As a parent, I also urgently request your support for this legislation with the potential to make a generational impact on the mental health, safety, and well-being of Maryland's children, including my own. When our children grow up seeing themselves represented in their class lessons, they are more confident, more creative, and more curious. This inclusion builds awareness to fight racism and violence in our communities. Teaching Asian American studies can be part of a strategy to address the wave of pandemic-related racism and anti-Asian violence through education.

Already, bills have been passed in Illinois and New Jersey. MoCoPAAN supports the inclusion of ethnic studies in the K-12 curriculum. . Already, bills have been passed in Illinois and New Jersey. MoCoPAAN supports the inclusion of ethnic studies in the K-12 curriculum. Senate Bill 304 is in alignment with this goal, and therefore, MoCoPAAN expresses support for its enactment.

ⁱ Sleeter, Christine E., and Miguel Zavala. *Transformative ethnic studies in schools: Curriculum, pedagogy, and research*. Teachers College Press, 2020.