

Madame Chair Attaberry, Vice Chair Wilkens and Honorable Members of the Committee;

I stand before you today with an impassioned plea: It is high time we acknowledge the invaluable contributions, rich heritage, and diverse experiences of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities in our nation, particularly in the vibrant tapestry of Maryland.

I have served several administrations since 2008 on the Asian & Pacific American Commission and witnessed the tremendous growth of the Asian Americans in our state and now it makes up over 8% of our state population. In 2010, the rate of increase in Frederick County was the highest. As an immigrant serving agency, our doors are open to all and we are very proud of our AAPI heritage. For the past 15 years or so, we celebrated AAPI Heritage Month, Lunar New Year, Moon Festival, and promote Chinese language learning. Decades have gone by, yet, despite these significant demographic proportions, our educational system has often overlooked the narratives, histories, and achievements of AAPI individuals and communities. During the COVID Pandemic, our AAPI students suffered threats, humiliation and harassment in schools. As an well established community based organization, we continued to be discounted of our contributions to our society at large. By incorporating AAPI curriculum into our schools through state legislation, we ensure the material is taught in a comprehensive and meaningful manner and students are presented with an accurate understanding of our nation's diverse heritage.

Frederick County may have smaller Asian American populations and less diverse Boards of Education, it is precisely in these areas where the inclusion of AAPI curriculum is most critical. By providing students in all districts with access to diverse perspectives and narratives, we can foster empathy, respect, and understanding among future generations. It has been painful to be addressed as "oriental" as N word was used for our African American communities.

In districts with larger Asian American populations, the inclusion of AAPI curriculum will help validate the identities and experiences of AAPI students. Too often, these students feel marginalized or invisible in the classroom due to the lack of representation in the curriculum. Studies have shown that students perform better academically when they see themselves represented in the curriculum and feel a connection to what they are learning. By providing all students with access to diverse perspectives and narratives, we can create a more inclusive learning environment where every student feels valued and empowered to succeed.

AAPI curriculum provides a crucial opportunity to address issues of representation and combat harmful stereotypes. Too often, Asian Americans are relegated to one-dimensional caricatures or overlooked entirely in mainstream narratives. By incorporating diverse perspectives into our educational materials, we empower students to challenge stereotypes, confront biases, and cultivate a more nuanced understanding of the world around them.

Legislating the inclusion of AAPI curriculum statewide will ensure that all students, regardless of their district or background, have the opportunity to learn about the rich history and contributions of AAPI communities. However, the extent to which it is covered will ultimately depend on implementation at the local level. Therefore, it is essential for the Maryland General Assembly to provide guidance and support to districts in effectively integrating AAPI curriculum into their schools. We are proud of our AAPI heritage and we are proud as being Americans.

In closing, I urge you to heed the call for inclusivity and equity in education. By embracing AAPI curriculum in our K-12 classrooms, we not only honor the contributions of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders but also enrich the educational experience for all students. Let us pave the way for a future where every child feels a sense of belonging and pride in their heritage, regardless of their background. Thank you.