

“You don’t belong here.”

For those of us in marginalized groups, we are all too familiar with this resounding message committed by the people and institutions around us, a message that ricochets between gestures of chronic exclusion and acts of acute hate.

For my child, a third generation Asian American of Taiwanese (Minnan) and Cantonese (Hakka) descent, those were the exact words whispered into her ear by a classmate of another Asian ethnicity - only days after she had turned 5 years old and days before schools would close indefinitely due to the SARS COV-2 pandemic of 2020.

For senselessly countless others since then, that was the same message delivered by spitting in the face, blows to the head, stabbings and much more. Racial taunts, threats, bullying and shunning have also resounded through schools of all grade levels.

Today, as a Montgomery County resident born in Gaithersburg, a daughter of immigrants from Taiwan, a parent of a now 3rd grader, and as a trailing spouse who has served on United States government orders in over six cities worldwide, I am testifying to say this:

I am Asian American and - it is a historical American fact that I belong here.

I know this as a fact because I have invested my own time to learn that it was an Asian American named Wong Kim Ark who, over 125 years ago, fought for the rights of all non-white Americans to citizenship by birth - and he did so courageously amidst a climate of white supremacists seeking to deport all descendants of non-white immigrants including non-white descendants of the enslaved.

I am also testifying to say this:

If today’s testimonies are the first time you are learning about how Asian Americans have made major contributions to American history, then you are also the victim of institutionalized ignorance in our schools that has continued for too many generations.

So let’s agree from today on that it’s only INSTITUTIONALIZED IGNORANCE that doesn’t belong here and pass HB 1363.