



March 2, 2026

Testimony on: HB1059 Education – Asian American History – Professional Development and Library Materials
Committees: Ways and Means

Position: Favorable

Dear Chair Jheanelle K. Wilkins, Vice Chair Jessica Feldmark, and Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for Maryland HB1059, “*Education – Asian American History – Professional Development and Library Materials*,” which seeks to enhance professional development opportunities for educators by incorporating Asian American history training programs into the state’s Continuing Professional Education Development program and through expansion of library resources. This initiative is a crucial step toward ensuring that Maryland’s educators and the community have access to high-quality, vetted resources that will enrich the curriculum and provide students with a more inclusive and accurate understanding of American history.

As a community leader and advocate for OCA Greater Washington DC Chapter, we are in strong support of Maryland House Bill 1059 to better equip educators with the knowledge and skills to teach *Asian American History* in Maryland schools through professional development and expansion of library resources. Stories of our communities have largely been invisible, and the lack of understanding of our histories is a major factor towards the resurgence of Anti-Asian hate that we have seen in the last few years.

These hate incidents rose by nearly 150% nationally since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The roots of anti-Asian hate are systemic and deeply embedded, yet the AAPI experience has long been invisible in school curriculums. Nearly 13%, (12.6%) of incidents were reported from school age youth suggesting that anti-Asian racism may begin at earlier ages. In particular, bullying of Asian American students can lead to significant impacts on psychological health, well-being, self-esteem, and development.

Having experienced racially-motivated bullying as a high school youth, I felt incredibly isolated growing up, especially in school systems that did not teach about the history and experiences of people from our communities. The parts of Asian American history that I learned were through self-education and were often traumatizing without having the opportunity for discussion. I learned about the Chinese Exclusion Act, for example, from flipping through a school text book and was horrified that there had been a law that legally excluded people of my ethnicity from this country. On a school field trip to Ellis Island during middle school, I saw an exhibit of a shack and when I read the story behind it, I learned about 120,000 Japanese Americans were forced into internment camps under horrible conditions. There were no other students from my school who visited the exhibit and it felt even more isolating that I could not discuss it. In high school, one of my teachers went as far as integrating the FuManChu racist caricature into the day’s history lesson, and even used accent mocking Chinese people while teaching.

These experiences motivated me as an adult to engage with the AAPI community in service as well as advocacy around anti-Asian hate and promoting inclusion of AAPI history as part of K-12 school curriculum. Having grown up in a system that did not teach this history, I am advocating for a different more diverse experience for the next generation of youth.

Within a broader diversity framework, this bill would offer an opportunity to create greater sensitivity to the AAPI experience, reduce stereotyping, school bullying, and ultimately hate incidents in the longer term. There have been many positive contributions of AAPIs to the United States including as political leaders, arts, sciences, and the building of infrastructure such as the Transcontinental Railroad. Through both oral and written historical sources, the story of the AAPI community’s vibrancy, civic engagement, resiliency, and hopes for a brighter future emerge and provide opportunities to teach about helping to build the very fabric of America.

Without specific inclusion in the curriculum, these experiences and contributions have been largely unknown, which contributes to the othering of the Asian American community as perpetual foreigners, when in fact there is an over 400 year history of the Asian American community in the US as well as a long rich history of the Pacific Islander community.

In summary, an expanding training and library resources for educators to teach Asian American history would be a positive benefit to reflect the diversity of communities living in Maryland and create greater sensitivity to diverse



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experiences from a young age, which may lead to longer term positive impacts such as reductions in stereotyping, bullying, and hate incidents. Therefore, we urge the committee to pass Maryland House Bill 1059. Please feel free to contact me with any questions: Adrienne.oca.dc@gmail.com.

Thank you,

Adrienne Poon

Adrienne Poon
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