

Casey Taira
Regarding HB 1059
Hearing Date: 3/04 at 1:00 p.m.

IN FAVOR

My name is Casey Taira and I am a fourth generation Chinese-Japanese-American who grew up in Maryland's public school system.

I am writing to support HB1059 and to shed light on how the lack of Asian-American representation in our history curriculum had caused me mental and emotional turmoil as a young student.

Despite my family having been here for over 40% of the USA's history, the stereotype remained that Asians were foreigners— perhaps perpetuated by threadbare lessons of our involvement in American history. I still carry with me to adulthood my embarrassment and anger as a classmate chased me around the lunch table with my own bowl of noodles as she mocked me in a “Chinese” accent while other students laughed.

I never really truly had a grasp on the contributions my people have made in American history until my junior year of highschool, when I looked beyond the bounds of Montgomery County's school system and participated in the Yuri Kochiyama Leadership Program hosted by the Asian American Student Union at the University of Maryland, College Park. In that program, for the first time in my 17 years of living, I was able to learn about the endless ways people like me helped to shape the America we know today— No longer was I confined to the sparse lines of text on Japanese internment camps, pandas, and ping-pong diplomacy.

Although I found strength and pride in my identity one way or another, I believe that children should not have to go on a wild goose chase to feel like they belong, and to know that they too have a rich legacy in this land. It is my hope that by re-framing the role Asian-Americans have had in American history, less children will have to endure the shame and humiliation of being “other-ed” by their peers. This bill would help lay the brickwork of a mutual respect that makes for the foundation of a stronger, more united community.

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony.