

Good afternoon, members of the Maryland Ways and Means Committee. I am here today to speak about representation in my education.

My name is Mackenzie Cho, and I am a 10th grader at Walter Johnson High School in Montgomery County, District 15. Unfortunately, this is my second year testifying on a bill that should have already been passed. I am still waiting to see myself reflected in my education.

This past year, when we learned about the Transcontinental Railroad and the Chinese Exclusion Act, less than a minute was spent discussing Asian Americans. Maryland prides itself on inclusion and diversity, yet when it comes to our stories, our voices go unheard. This impacts more than 61,000 Asian American students enrolled in Maryland public schools. That is 61,000 students whose histories and contributions are erased.

Growing up, I never learned about Asian American leaders, accomplishments, or struggles in my classrooms. Without representation, I did not know what I was capable of. While I was fortunate to find support within my community, family, and friends, I never found that same affirmation in my education.

Last year, I testified before this committee and later before my county's Board of Education in support of this bill. The day before my county testimony, I experienced a grand mal seizure at school and for those who don't know what that is when you unconsciously shake vigorously. I was unconscious for hours and taken to the emergency room by ambulance. The next day, I returned to school and went to deliver my testimony. No one in that room knew what had happened the day before.

I share that not for sympathy, but to show how deeply this issue matters to me.

After years of advocating, I am still asking to be seen. Please vote favorable on House Bill 1059.