

WRITTEN TESTIMONY FOR SC 2198
SUBMITTED BY LALITHA PAMIDIGANTAM, POLICY ANALYST
TESTIFYING AS PROPONENT

Chair Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate Finance Committee,

My name is Lalitha Pamidigantam and I live in Columbus. Today, I am representing YWCA Columbus, whose mission is to eliminate racism, empower women, and promote peace, justice, freedom, and dignity to all. Ohio's Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) population is one of the state's fastest-growing racial/ethnic demographic groups, having increased by 40% between 2000 and 2009. It is notable that currently, Asian and AAPI Ohioans are the only ethnic group without a state level entity that would allow for coordination of resources and provide a centralized point of contact.

Our agency is aware of the holes in social safety nets that AAPI Ohioans fall through. With the rise in anti-Asian hate crimes—something that is not new but ever virulent—we recognize the need to fight for marginalized groups wherever we see disenfranchisement and lack of resources.

For this reason, I am writing in support of the budget amendment that creates and funds the Ohio AAPI Commission and the Office of AAPI Affairs. With the escalation of anti-Asian violence that has accompanied the COVID-19 pandemic, the deaths of six Asian women on March 16th in Atlanta, and the loss of four Sikh lives in the Indianapolis shooting on April 15th, the Ohio Asian and AAPI community live in a constant state of fear and anxiety. Something needs to change. While resolutions and statements of solidarity help bring awareness to anti-Asian hate, we must take actionable steps to protect AAPI communities from further harm and violence and to invest in our wellbeing and livelihood. YWCA Columbus fights for all marginalized people experiencing racism and discrimination. We believe all people deserve equity under the law and the ability to thrive without fear in American society.

Your support for the Ohio AAPI Commission and Office of AAPI affairs along with your support for the additional two amendments listed below will help demonstrate that Ohio is invested in our community's safety and wellbeing:

1. Create and Fund the Ohio AAPI Affairs Commission and the Office of AAPI Affairs
2. \$2M earmarks for grants for community organizations that serve Asians and AAPIs
3. Increases earmarks for Refugee Program Services by \$100,000 per year

An AAPI Commission in Ohio will extend useful resources and data to us and to sister agencies across the state, and will aid in closing the gap on service delivery programs that we provide, such as housing, education, and childcare. Our reach will be far improved with resources going towards reaching those in need of service through language assistance and will build a stronger Ohio community that is resilient in the face of the unknown. The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us that we can only be stronger together. YWCA Columbus fights for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, especially as the women in these groups are traditionally left out of the equity dialogue. We are all responsible for one another's safety, and it is time to do what we must to protect our Asian American and Pacific Islander neighbors.

I respectfully and strongly encourage the Senate Finance Committee to pass these amendments. Thank you for your time and for the opportunity to testify in support of the above amendments.