

Testimony for HB 171
Submitted by: Annette M. Iwamoto
Organization: OPAWL
Testifying as Proponent

Chair Bird, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee,

My name is Annette Iwamoto, I live in Cleveland Heights, and I am a parent of a kindergartener attending public school and a three-year-old future public school student. I am asking this committee to support H.B. 171 which updates the Social Studies model curriculum to better reflect the histories of all Ohioans by including the migration histories, societal contributions and experiences of a range of communities in Ohio and the United States who are not currently represented in our classrooms.

The first time I remember being told to go back to my country was in elementary school. I can vividly recall being about six years old, with friends on the playground before being approached by a group of older children. I was born an American citizen, as was my father, and his parents. I don't remember learning in school about the contributions or existence of Asian Americans in the history of our country. From an early age, I remember feeling like an outsider. Once I got to college, I decided to major in History, and took a class called "Exploring Asian American Experiences." All of a sudden, history and stories that reflected my family's experience became accessible to me - books, essays, photographs, and videos showing me and my classmates how Asian Americans are part of the fabric of this country.

Several years later I came to Cleveland to serve as a City Year Americorps member, dedicating a year of service to helping mentor and tutor students. One day, while entering an elementary school gymnasium to help with an afterschool program, a group of students rushed up to me. "Are you from China? Are you from Korea? Are you from Japan?" They asked me. I've been asked these questions my whole life, but where as a child it pushed me to become ashamed of my background and appearance, I had since gained perspective that these were students who had not been exposed to people of Asian ancestry, born in the United States.

When my first child was born, almost six years ago, I prepared myself that he may go through the same experiences as I had, such as the feelings of isolation from his peers. Only more recently I have begun to believe that my experience does not have to be my children's experience.

I respectfully urge the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee to consider my testimony and to vote yes in support of H.B. 171. Your actions will ensure my son and my daughter alongside their classmates, hear an American history that includes the sacrifices, experiences, and contributions of many different ethnic and racial groups. We fail our kids when we don't provide them with an education that truly mirrors Ohio's current makeup as a state. H.B. 171 can solve for that by educating students about the experiences, migration, and contributions of a range of communities that already, and in many cases, have long called Ohio home. Thank you for your time and the opportunity to testify in support of this legislation.