



Opponent Testimony
Senate Bill 83
Jona Hilario
OPAWL Co-Director
Ohio Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee
April 15, 2023

Chairman Cirino, Vice-Chair Rulli, Ranking member Ingram and members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee;

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony. My name is Jona Hilario, I am a resident of Columbus, Ohio and current Statewide Co-Director of OPAWL. We are a statewide grassroots community of Asian, Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women and non-binary people in Ohio. Our organization is a multi-ethnic, multi-generational community and our 300 members represent the diverse diaspora from Asia and the Pacific Islands.

OPAWL urges this committee to reject Senate Bill 83.

In addition to the serious concerns raised by other speakers today about this bill and its impacts on freedom of speech, worker's rights, Diversity, equity and inclusion on campus, I would like to highlight how this bill's proposal to prohibit academic relationships with Chinese educational institutions endangers the AAPI community in what is already a hostile environment.

AAPI Ohioans have been living in a state of heightened fear and anxiety for the last three years as our community has experienced a resurgence in rates of hate incidents nationally and locally since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. A recently released FBI report shows that hate crimes against AAPIs more than doubled from 2020 to 2021, with our communities experiencing the sharpest increase in hate

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crimes of all protected groups¹, while hate crimes in general have increased across the board. Stop AAPI Hate, an organization that has been tracking hate incidents against AAPIs since 2020 has received over 11,000 reports of racism, harassment and discrimination since the mass shooting in Atlanta in March of 2021. In Ohio there were 128 cases reported between March 2020 and September 2021 including a Vietnamese family-owned restaurant in Dayton that closed down after being set ablaze and vandalized with the words “F*ck U China Virus” and “F*ck China”. This demonstrates the danger Sinophobia poses not just for Chinese and Chinese Americans but for all Asians and Americans of Asian descent. Because the majority of Americans can’t distinguish between Asian ethnicities, scapegoating one Asian country can generate racism against people descended from other Asian countries. This pattern recurs throughout US history including during World War 2, the Korean War and the Vietnam War. A rise in China-bashing particularly from leaders and politicians contribute to the rise in anti-Asian racism. Quoting from Prof Russel Jeung, a professor in Asian American studies “When America China-bashes, then Chinese get bashed and so do those who “look” Chinese. American foreign policy in Asia is American domestic policy for Asians”.²

While there are many legitimate criticisms of the actions of the Chinese government and businesses in the People’s Republic of China, we must distinguish between legitimate criticism and threat inflation, and all of us, including our elected officials, must fulfill our responsibility to avoid reinforcing the narratives that are most likely to feed racism and violence against our fellow Ohioans.² The bill reinforces an inflated threat narrative and unnecessarily puts our students, faculty, staff and broader community at further risk for harm from individuals who feel encouraged to imagine that these threats come from not only China (as in the country/government) but also from individual people who are perceived to be of Chinese descent. This policy causes much more harm than the current geopolitical situation warrants.

In addition to my concerns about safety, as an Ohio State Alumni I believe this will also negatively impact the international reputation, research and innovation

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programs of the University and other educational institutions. If institutions were barred from renewing or entering into new academic partnerships with educational institutions in China, the damage to the international reputation, research and innovation programs, and quality of educational experience at universities across Ohio would be devastating. I came here as an International student partly because of the commitment I saw from OSU to be welcoming to students from all over the world. If I were applying to universities now knowing that this is happening here, I would not give Ohio a passing glance.

I urge this committee to not move forward with this destructive, harmful bill.

Respectfully submitted,

Jona Hilario

Co-Director

OPAWL – Building AAPI Feminist Leadership

Footnotes:

- 1) “New FBI Data Shows More Hate Crimes. These Groups Show the Sharpest Rise”
The Marshall Project; March 25, 2023
<https://www.themarshallproject.org/2023/03/25/asian-hate-crime-fbi-black-lgbtq>
- 2) “How China Threat Narratives Feed Anti-Asian Racism and How to Fight Back”
Justice is Global; August 8, 2021
https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c59dba8e4afe93ee4da1aa8/t/60c77beaa1948139ad82f484/1623686123313/JIG_AntiAsianRacismReport_2021_0608.pdf

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