

Opponent Testimony on House Bill 1 – Ohio Property Protection Act

State Representative Munira Abdullahi

136th General Assembly

Ohio House of Representatives

Chairwoman Abrams, Vice Chair Miller, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the House Public Safety Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in opposition to House Bill 1.

My name is Representative Munira Abdullahi, and I proudly represent Ohio's 9th House District. I stand before you not only as a legislator but as someone who comes from and serves a district that reflects the vibrant diversity of our state— home to thousands of new Americans, immigrants, refugees, and first-generation families who contribute to our neighborhoods, our economy, and our future.

I understand and respect the desire to protect our state's critical infrastructure and national security. But House Bill 1, as written, is overly broad, constitutionally questionable, and opens the door to discrimination—against people who are simply trying to live, work, and build a life in Ohio.

This bill prohibits certain individuals and entities from or associated with countries listed as “foreign adversaries” from owning property within 25 miles of military installations or critical infrastructure. But who exactly is being targeted? Let's be honest: this bill isn't going after foreign governments—it's going after people. Immigrants. International students. Small business owners. Families.

House Bill 1 closely mirrors Florida's Senate Bill 264, enacted in 2023, which sought to restrict property ownership by individuals from certain countries, including China. This law faced immediate legal challenges. In February 2024, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit granted a preliminary injunction, blocking enforcement of the law against two Chinese nationals who were in the process of purchasing property. The court found that the plaintiffs were likely to succeed on their claim that the Florida law was preempted by federal law, specifically the Foreign Investment Risk Review Modernization Act of 2018 (FIRRMA), which grants the federal government authority over foreign investment in the U.S.

Moreover, the court acknowledged concerns that the law could violate the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment by discriminating based on national origin. This legal precedent highlights the constitutional vulnerabilities of enacting state-level restrictions that target individuals based on their nationality.

We should take that ruling seriously. We should not pass a bill that risks the same legal vulnerabilities, particularly one that could be weaponized in ways we can't fully predict today.

This bill doesn't just target foreign governments—it targets people. It gives law enforcement and county auditors sweeping authority to interrogate the background of any buyer or seller. It assumes bad intent based on someone's national origin or connections abroad, even if they're law-abiding residents or immigrants seeking to build a life here. Such measures risk alienating immigrant communities and could deter foreign investment, ultimately harming Ohio's economy.

And while this bill may be aimed at a narrow national security concern, we know from history and experience that vague laws are often misused. Imagine the chilling effect this could have on immigrant communities across Ohio—families who are building businesses, buying homes, and investing in their futures, now having to second-guess whether they'll be scrutinized or rejected based on their name or country of birth.

Let's also not ignore the practical challenges: This legislation puts enormous responsibility on county sheriffs and prosecutors to investigate property ownership claims—without providing them the resources or clear guidance to do so. This isn't just a security bill—it's an unfunded mandate on local governments that could lead to inconsistent, inequitable enforcement.

Instead of building walls around our state, we should be building pathways for all Ohioans to thrive. We should be addressing foreign threats through federal intelligence and national defense channels—not through property transactions and profiling.

House Bill 1, in its current form, is not only legally risky—it's morally short-sighted. I urge this committee to oppose this Bill and work toward solutions that truly balance our values of security, fairness, and inclusion.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Representative Munira Abdullahi
Ohio House District 9