

Testimony Against House Bill 1

Submitted by: Ying Chen

Testifying as Opponent

May, 18, 2025

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

I hope this message finds you well. I want to express my gratitude for the opportunity to testify against House Bill 1 (HB1).

Today is a beautiful, quintessential Ohio summer weekend. In the early morning, birdsong can be heard from the large tree in my front yard, and the flowers in the garden are blooming. A small brown bunny with a white tail is looking for food in the lawn, undisturbed by the world around it. By afternoon, a chipmunk and the squirrels in my backyard come out, including a beautiful, snowy white squirrel. It makes me worry, as it's an easy target for predators. Birds also make their way into my backyard—a few gray pigeons, orange robins, and even a bright blue one, though my favorite is the red cardinal. For some reason, I haven't seen sparrows or hummingbirds this year. As evening falls, it's the time for the children of our new neighbors to play. I can hear their laughter from my kitchen as they run around with their dogs past my back door.

This is the home I love. Seventeen years ago, we bought it after moving from Texas to Ohio. It was a pivotal year in my life. I was on an H4 visa and received my admission letter to Wright State University's graduate school. Additionally, I was pregnant. To avoid disturbing others in an apartment and to provide a better living environment for my unborn baby, we drained our savings to put a 10% down payment on this home, which remains the only property we have ever owned.

Several months later, my son was born, who is now a high school junior. Hereafter, I earned my master's degree and transitioned from a stay-at-home mother to a data analyst. We've worked extremely hard to contribute to Ohio's economy and the growth of the Dayton community. I am a proud U.S. citizen now. As a legal immigrant, I've lived out my American Dream step by step. Every day, my heart is filled with gratitude for the opportunities I have been given in this country.

My story is not unique. I believe that every legal immigrant who comes to America, who embraces American values, and who works toward their version of the American Dream,

has a similar hope. They strive to contribute to the economic and social development of the local community, to be recognized for their efforts, and to build their own home here—a milestone of the American Dream. Owning real property is the most important way for people to establish a sense of belonging. They call Ohio home, not just a place to stay at. Their hard work also contributes immensely to America's prosperity and technological advancement.

I understand the importance of safeguarding our critical infrastructure, and as a U.S. citizen and an Ohio resident, I support the focus on national security. However, I urge you to reconsider the implications of HB1, which seeks to bar foreign entities and foreign individuals from owning real property in Ohio.

In addition to hurting people's American Dream, restricting immigrants and foreign enterprises from owning property in Ohio would also have a serious detrimental effect on the state's economy.

First, HB1 will undermine the interest and belief of immigrants in continuing to work and live in Ohio, forcing many to leave the state. It unfairly punishes legal immigrants, who have distanced themselves from their countries of origin, traveled thousands of miles, and placed their trust in American values to pursue the American Dream. It's heartbreaking that such immigrants, who contribute to the local economy and community, would be penalized for actions taken by foreign governments. Not only would this drive away skilled tech talent, but we could also see the disappearance of beloved local businesses, such as affordable and authentic Chinese restaurants.

Second, foreign businesses would be forced to exit, and many their employees being Ohio residents lose their jobs. And future foreign investments in Ohio would likely diminish. Foreign enterprises not only help to drive economic prosperity and tax revenue but also create valuable local employment opportunities. With the departure of immigrants and foreign businesses, HB1 would result in significant losses of both tax revenue and jobs for Ohio, especially in the long term.

The last, but certainly not least, concern I have is the potential for HB1 to fuel discrimination and hatred toward people of Asian Americans. As an Asian immigrant, I am deeply concerned about the unintended consequences of this bill. It could easily create an atmosphere of distrust and prejudice toward Asian communities, further dividing us when unity and inclusion are direly needed for the country to face challenges across the world.

In light of these concerns, I propose two refinements to HB1:

1. Narrow the scope of the bill to specifically target foreign governments and foreign nationals who are linked to genuine security threats. This should explicitly exempt U.S. citizens, permanent residents, and legal immigrants. This ensures that the bill addresses actual national security concerns without unjustly impacting those who embrace American values and who work to contribute to society.
2. Exempt residential property purchases from these restrictions, especially for legal immigrants. Many of us who have worked hard for years to build a life here should not be prevented from owning homes in Ohio, as this would directly undermine the fabric of the American Dream for legal immigrants.

Finally, while it may be a good idea to scrutinize real property purchases near critical infrastructure (for example, within a 25-mile radius), it would be unnecessary to target law-abiding, legal immigrants in this process.

In closing, I respectfully urge the committee members to carefully weigh these factors and reconsider HB1, either by dropping the bill entirely or revising it to strike a balance between national security, economic prosperity for Ohio, and the well-being of all Ohioans, including legal immigrants who are integral to our state.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Ying Chen