



Opponent Testimony for Senate Bill 88
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Organization: OPAWL - Building AAPI Feminist Leadership
Testifying as Opponent

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Chair Roegner, Vice-Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Blackshear and Members of the General Government Committee

My name is Jona Hilario, and I am a proud naturalized US citizen currently residing in Columbus, Ohio with my husband and two kids. I am asking this committee to oppose Senate Bill 88 which unfairly targets immigrant communities under the pretense of national security. These bills revive the discriminatory history of Alien Land Laws, which have been ruled unconstitutional and have long been used to suppress Asian, Muslim and immigrant communities.

May is Asian Pacific American Heritage Month and this bill comes as a slap in the face for Asian American Ohioans on this month when we celebrate our communities' cultures and contributions to this country we have chosen to call home. This bill takes a wholesale approach to labeling immigrants from China as "foreign adversaries" based solely on where they were born. This is dangerous rhetoric that comes at a time when the Asian American community has been under threat of acts of hate.

AAPI Ohioans continue to live in a state of heightened fear and anxiety since we experienced a surge in anti-Asian hate incidents during the COVID-19 pandemic. Members of our community here in Ohio, including children and elders have been spat on, yelled at to "go back to where you came from", and harassed in public spaces like grocery stores simply for looking the way they do. Sinophobia endangers all AAPIs, for example in 2021 a Vietnamese family-owned restaurant in Dayton closed down after

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being set ablaze and vandalized with the words “F*ck U China Virus” and “F*ck China”. 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”.¹ A recent study has shown that 25% of people in the US already see Chinese people as a threat while 63% of Asian Americans feel unsafe in day to day spaces and fear they’ll be a victim of discrimination within the next five years².

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 neighbors, friends and co-workers 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.

It is also confusing why China is being singled out since Chinese ownership of US land has been declining and the countries that own the most land in Ohio are Denmark, Canada, the Netherlands and Portugal.³

I urge you to vote NO on Senate Bill 88 to ensure Ohio remains a welcoming state for all its residents. Thank you for your time.

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Footnotes:

1. "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
2. "Over 25% of people in the US say Chinese Americans are a threat" NBC News; May 2, 2025
<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/25-percent-americans-say-chinese-americans-threat-rcna204442>
3. "Foreign farmland ownership is increasing in Ohio, across US" The Ohio Newsroom; March 10, 2025
<https://www.stateneews.org/section/the-ohio-newsroom/2025-03-10/foreign-farmland-ownership-is-increasing-in-ohio-across-u-s>