

May 23, 2025

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify against Senate Bill 88 (SB88). I work in the field of higher education in Ohio. I am submitting this testimony in my personal capacity as a concerned citizen who strongly oppose SB 88 in its entirety.

Today, I stand before you as a voter, a taxpayer, a teacher, and a history student and a naturalized citizen to express my unequivocal opposition to Senate Bill 88, a piece of legislation that is not only unnecessary but also deeply discriminatory. This bill—by targeting land ownership and property rights of individuals based on their national origin or perceived ties to foreign governments—resurrects some of the most shameful chapters in American history. Make no mistake: SB88 is a modern-day echo of the **Chinese Exclusion Act** and the **Alien Land Laws of 1913**. It is racism enshrined in law.

SB88 proposes restrictions that would bar individuals from owning land simply because of their connections to countries like China. This is not about national security—it is about xenophobia. The bill invokes fear and suspicion of anyone with ties to nations deemed “foreign adversaries,” without regard for their loyalty, or constitutional rights. This is racial profiling masquerading as policy.

We’ve seen this before.

In 1913, California passed the Alien Land Law targeting Asian immigrants, particularly the Japanese, Chinese, and Indian communities, preventing them from owning property. These laws were eventually overturned as unconstitutional and morally reprehensible. But the damage they caused—tearing apart communities, denying immigrants the American dream, institutionalizing racism—lasted for generations.

Senate Bill 88 is **the Alien Land Law 2.0**. It weaponizes fear against Asian Americans and other immigrant communities and revives the ugly notion that some people, by virtue of their heritage, can never truly belong.

We also cannot ignore the parallels with the **Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882**, the first U.S. law to ban immigration based on race and nationality. That law was eventually repealed, and it remains a national embarrassment. If passed, SB88 will take its place alongside those disgraced policies. History will not look kindly on this legislature if it chooses to repeat the sins of the past.

The legal ramifications are just as alarming. SB88 likely violates several constitutional protections, including:

- The Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment, by discriminating against individuals based on national origin.

- The Due Process Clause of the 5th and 14th Amendments, by depriving individuals of property rights without sufficient cause.
- The Supremacy Clause of the U.S. Constitution, as the bill intrudes into matters—like national security and foreign policy—that are explicitly the domain of the federal government.

Let me be clear: federal laws already exist to address concerns about national security and foreign investment. The Foreign Investment Risk Review Modernization Act (FIRRMA), overseen by the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS), gives the federal government the authority to block transactions that pose a credible threat to national security. There is no need for states to pile on with discriminatory laws that undermine our constitutional principles and stigmatize entire communities.

SB88 is not only unnecessary—it is dangerous. It promotes racial profiling under the guise of patriotism. It sends a chilling message to Asian Americans and immigrants: that no matter how long they have lived here, no matter how much they contribute, they will always be viewed as suspects.

It is ironic that you are considering this dangerous bill in the AAPI Month when we are supposed to celebrate the contributions of the Asian American communities.

If you support the bill, you should ask yourself: What legacy are you leaving behind? Will your children and grandchildren be proud of the choices you made? Or will they be forced to apologize for the harm you inflicted, the rights you denied, and the fear you spread?

We are at a moral crossroads. Ohio can choose to uphold justice, equality, and the Constitution—or it can choose to follow the path of exclusion and discrimination. I urge you to reject Senate Bill 88 in its entirety and prevent this legislature from leaving a legacy of shame that future generations will have to rectify. Please choose a future for Ohio that is open, fair, and welcoming to all.

Sincerely,

Hongmei Li