

Testimony Opposing SB88 and In Defense of Equal Protection and Ohio's Future

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

My name is Jie Chen. I came to the United States in 2003 as an international student. From the very beginning, I was drawn to this country not just by opportunity, but by its spirit—its openness, inclusiveness, and commitment to equality. I believed, and still believe, that in America, people can fully realize their potential while giving back to the country they live in. Over the past 40 years, I've lived in several places—China, Hong Kong, Canada, and the U.S.—but since moving to Ohio in 2016, I've found where I truly belong. I consider Ohio my home and hope it will be the place I live for the rest of my life.

But now, Senate Bill 88 proposes to prohibit individuals from six so-called "foreign adversary" countries from owning or holding any interest in real estate in Ohio, unless they meet narrow and often impractical exceptions. Under this bill, even long-term, law-abiding residents—such as green card holders and H-1B professionals—would be required to sell their homes within two years. I am not a citizen of any of these countries, but I am deeply alarmed. The idea that a lawful immigrant, who may have lived here for decades, paid taxes, and raised a family, can be forced to sell their home based solely on nationality is shocking. It contradicts everything I believed about American values—fairness, due process, and equal protection under the law. It's not just a policy mistake—it's a direct threat to human dignity and the principle of non-discrimination.

Let me tell you who you're actually targeting:

Ohio has over 601,000 immigrants, 63% of whom have Asian heritage. Together, they generate \$53 billion in state GDP, and pay \$7 billion in taxes, including \$2.5 billion in state and local taxes.

(Source: American Immigration Council, 2024; Policy Matters Ohio, 2024)

Asian immigrant-owned businesses employ nearly 97,600 Ohioans and contribute a \$3.3 billion payroll.

(Source: Final Snapshot: Asian Population in Ohio, 2023)

These families hold an estimated \$28 billion in housing wealth. If only a third are forced to leave, \$9 billion in housing would flood the market, destabilizing home prices and undermining Ohio's economy.

(Source: American Immigration Council; Policy Matters Ohio, 2024)

National security is important. But we already have powerful federal tools in place:

The Foreign Investment Risk Review Modernization Act (FIRRMA) grants CFIUS the authority to block or reverse foreign real estate transactions that may present national security concerns—especially near military bases or critical infrastructure

(Source: FIRRMA, 50 U.S.C. § 4564)

The Defense Production Act, OFAC regulations, and federal visa controls provide further layers of protection

(Source: Export Administration Regulations and OFAC Sanctions Guidelines)

These federal laws are targeted, evidence-based, and case-by-case. SB88, in contrast, is broad, nationality-based, and punitive, regardless of the individual's background or intent.

We've seen how the courts respond to such overreach. In *Shen v. Simpson*, the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals granted an injunction against Florida's SB264, finding that it was likely preempted by federal law and likely violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. In Judge Abudu's concurring opinion, she wrote that a "blanket ban against Chinese non-citizens from purchasing land" blatantly violates constitutional protections

(Source: *Shen v. Simpson*, Preliminary Injunction, 2024; 11th Circuit Court)

If national security is the goal, let the federal process handle it with rigor and precision. But don't let a state law undermine lives based on where someone was born.

Therefore, I respectfully urge this committee to reject SB88, or at the very least, to amend it to clearly exempt lawful permanent residents and H-1B visa holders. These individuals are long-term contributors to our communities. They've been vetted, taxed, and trusted. Telling them to sell their homes is not just unjust—it's unconstitutional.

I came to Ohio because I believed in what this state and country represent. Please don't let SB88 send the message that some people, no matter how much they contribute, will never fully belong.

Thank you for your time and your service to our state.