

Dear Chairman Wiggam, Vice Chairwoman John, Ranking Member Representative Kelly, and Members of the State and Local Government Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Karis Tzeng, and I am an urban planner and community development professional for MidTown Cleveland, Inc., where I have served the AsiaTown community for two years. I am also a member of OPAWL, a statewide grassroots community of Asian and Asian American and Pacific Islander Women and non-binary people in Ohio. Our organization is a multi-ethnic, multi-generational community and we represent the diverse diaspora from Asia and the Pacific Islands. I strongly oppose HB 322.

As a community and economic development worker, I oppose this bill because students deserve to learn accurate and complete American history, which includes but is not limited to Asian American and Pacific Islander American/AAPI history. Additionally, racism experienced by AAPI's is inextricably tied to American history and cannot be ignored or erased. Our children deserve to learn about what factors led to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and U.S. involvement in important historical events like the Secret War in Laos, which became the most heavily bombed country in world history.

If this bill passes, a censored and skewed version of history and current events that highlights a select few will be taught in the classroom, completely ignoring and erasing the history of Indigenous, Black, Brown, Asian, Pacific Islander, other communities of color, and the LGBTQIA+ communities. The bills are so vaguely worded in terms of defining what is and is not allowed to be taught in the classroom. The chilling effect of this purposefully vague language is that our teachers will be fearful of approaching topics that are challenging but factual. It is imperative, now more than ever, for our children to learn about these events as they are important parts of our country's foundational history.

These bills prevent students from better understanding their differences in individual identity, experience and culture by preventing them from participating in diversity, equity and inclusion programs. The lack of AAPI history in curriculum omits the place of Asian communities in the history of our country and communities. It erases the history of our communities, and in doing so, it erases our stories. As an urban planner, my education taught me the harms of urban renewal on communities of color, particularly Black and immigrant communities across the country. I learned about the destruction of erasure of Chinatowns, including in Cleveland, and Black business districts, including Euclid Avenue. This understanding is critical to working with communities and towards stitching together thriving, whole communities.

As an urban planner in Cleveland and a member of the growing AAPI Ohio population, I ask you to strongly consider my testimony opposing HB 322 and vote NO on this bill.

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully submitted,

Karis Tzeng
Director of AsiaTown Initiatives at MidTown Cleveland, Inc.