

Opponent Testimony for House Bill 327

Melinda Dang

State and Local Government Committee

9/20/2021

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 Melinda Dang. I was born and raised in Ohio, and although I call Ohio my home, people often consider me a foreigner and make me feel like I do not belong. I am just as American as anyone else. I am a public health professional; I care about the lives of all people, of all ages and backgrounds. 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 327.**

As an Asian American and fierce advocate for education, 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 AAPIs 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. What proponents of the bill may consider "divisive concepts" is just information they are uncomfortable learning about, but we must teach these lessons to effectively learn from them and prevent harm from happening to communities over and over again. Oppose this bill, because we need students to think for themselves, and be exposed to this information. We need to open our eyes and expand the curriculum, because Asians have been in the U.S. since the 1700s.

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.

Knowing history - including AAPI history - allows us to know ourselves as Americans. If this bill passes, we are basically showing to everyone in Ohio whose history really matters and deserves to be talked about and shared with the next generations. AAPIs matter. Include us and tell our stories.

Furthermore, a survey commissioned by the nonprofit Leading Asian Americans to Unite for Change, found that 42% of people in the U.S. can't name a single Asian American. When asked to name a famous Asian American, 42% of respondents answered "don't know." The next most popular choices were martial arts legends Jackie Chan (11%), who's from Hong Kong, and Bruce Lee (9%), who died nearly a half-century ago. This is ridiculous and there are so many Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders that shaped the country, from the very beginning when it was founded. AAPIs built the railroads, worked on plantations, sugar cane farms, fought for civil rights, and so much more. The survey also found that fewer than 1 in 4 Asian Americans feel respected in this country. And this should not be the case.

Please take my words seriously. **As a member of the growing AAPI Ohio population, I ask you to strongly consider my testimony opposing HB 327 and vote NO on this bill.**

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully submitted,

Melinda Dang