



**Written Testimony for SC 2198**

**Submitted by: Jona Hilario**

**Organization: OPAWL - Building AAPI Feminist Leadership**

**Testifying as Proponent**

**Chair Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate Finance committee,**

My name is Jona Hilario and I live in Columbus, Ohio. I am an immigrant from the Philippines, a mother of two and current Statewide Co-Director of OPAWL. We are 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.

**Today I am asking you to include the budget amendment that creates and funds the Ohio AAPI Commission and the Office of AAPI Affairs in the Senate version of the State Budget.** The AAPI community, like all Ohioans, have been drastically affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to worries over our health, our families' health, job security and our kid's education, we have also had to contend with a sharp increase in incidents of Anti-Asian physical violence, verbal abuse, profiling, and discrimination targeting our communities. This violence reached a peak with the mass shooting in Atlanta. This has left our communities scared and anxious about our safety. The conditions that led to Atlanta and Indianapolis exist right here in Ohio. The continued inaction from the State contributes to our feelings of invisibility. We need to know that our state leaders see us and see what we have been going through and we need a clear channel of communication through which our demands and requests can be heard. Our community cannot wait another two years to have a voice in our state government. We need you to demonstrate to the more than 350,000 Asian and AAPI Ohioans that Ohio is invested in our safety and well-being. These entities will enable the state government to create and cultivate meaningful relationships directly with our communities, allowing for a better understanding of our needs and a greater ability to serve us. The commission can

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also provide more opportunities for the government and AAPI communities and organizations to collaborate on the challenges that we face.

I am also asking you to support two other budget amendments that provide funding for services that benefit members of our communities. **One amendment earmarks \$2M per year to go towards grants for community organizations across the state of Ohio that directly serve AAPI communities. The other is an amendment that increases the funding for Refugee Program Services by \$100,000 per year.** Both these amendments are reasonable investments that would make a huge difference in ensuring that effective AAPI-led organizations that have been providing essential direct services to our communities can address the issues I've mentioned above in our growing communities. A recent report from Asian American and Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy shows that only 0.2% or put a different way only 2 cents of \$100 grant dollars in the United States go to AAPI communities. And this share has been flat even as the population of AAPIs in the country has doubled. AAPI-serving and AAPI-led organizations need more financial support and resources to continue to serve our growing numbers.

These three amendments are concrete ways for the state to demonstrate to our communities that our safety and well-being are a priority for Ohio.

In summary, I ask you to include the following three budget amendments in the State Budget:

1. Create and Fund the Ohio AAPI Affairs Commission and the Office of AAPI Affairs
2. \$2M earmarks for grants for community organizations that serve Asians and AAPIs
3. Increases earmarks for Refugee Program Services by \$100,000 per year

Thank you for your time.

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