



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 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 am here today to ask you to demonstrate to Asian and AAPI Ohioans that our state government sees us. We are the fastest growing racial and ethnic demographic group in the state with our numbers increasing 40% between 2000 and 2009. However we are the only ethnic group without a state level entity that would allow coordination of resources and provide a centralized point of contact between the state and our communities.

Our community, like all Ohioans have been drastically affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to the normal worries over 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. Stop AAPI Hate, an organization that tracks hate incidents against Asians and AAPI nationally reported over 6500 incidents between March 2020 and March 2021. We were devastated by the shooting and murder of six Asian women in Atlanta which was quickly followed by the death of four Sikhs in another mass shooting in Indianapolis. We have seen our elders sliced, punched, shoved, kicked, and spit on just while walking on the streets. We have heard many stories within our organization of members and their family members here in Ohio who have been harassed, yelled at to leave, had eggs thrown at them and were blamed for the pandemic while just being out in public. The conditions that led to Atlanta and

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Indianapolis exist right here in Ohio. 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.

For this reason, I am asking you to support the budget amendment that creates and funds the Ohio AAPI Commission and the Office of AAPI Affairs. This is one way for you, our state leaders, to demonstrate to the more than 350,000 Asian and AAPI Ohioans that Ohio is invested in the safety and well-being of our community. These entities will enable our 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 our communities. . The commission can also provide more opportunities for the government and AAPI communities and organizations to collaborate on the challenges that our communities 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.** We have many effective AAPI-led organizations that have been providing essential direct services to our communities and several of them will be represented by testimony here today or have submitted their own written testimonies for these amendments. They 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 support the following three budget amendments:

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

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Thank you for this opportunity to testify on these amendments.

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