

Testimony for HB 171
Submitted by: Anna Chen
Testifying as Proponent

Chair Bird, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee,

My name is Anna Chen, I live in Cuyahoga Falls, and I am the communications specialist of Asian Services in Action, the largest health and social services agency that serves Asian American and Pacific Islander communities in Ohio. I am a citizen in Ohio, and I am asking this committee to support HB 171 which updates the Social Studies model curriculum to better reflect the histories of all Ohioans by including the migration histories, societal contributions and experiences of a range of communities in Ohio and the United States who are not currently represented in our classrooms.

I grew up with Ohio's K-12 public school curriculum from 2000 to 2012. I took honors and AP history classes throughout high school under a rigorous syllabus. Although on paper and transcript my social studies education was advanced, the truth was that there was so much about my own country and community that I did not know until well into college.

It was only in college when, upon meeting new friends who were fifth generation Chinese American, that I knew that there was an Asian American community throughout American history that wasn't only involved in the California Gold Rush or the Transcontinental Railroad. It was only in college that I learned about the Tulsa race massacre and how the effects of Reconstruction and financial disenfranchisement but still impact Black communities and neighborhoods today. It was well after high school that I learned that the United States had a significant African immigrant population, when I met classmates in college and asked them the wrong questions.

I do not claim my ignorance to be the fault of my teachers, who worked hard to instruct all their students on as much material as possible. But the truth of the matter is that for at least eighteen years of my life there were little to no literature, narratives, or media readily available for a child that hinted to a bigger story than what I thought I knew about the United States, in our outside the classroom. This is not about having the most knowledge on historical trivia. This is about breathing, living people in my community and their experiences, struggles, and stories. This is about understanding that each and every one of us—whether we come from Asia, the Middle East, the Appalachians, or the Caribbean—belong in the United States and have always belonged.

This bill does not intend to segment or compartmentalize American history. All communities—African American, Asian American, Pacific Islander, Native American, Jewish American, Arab American—have participated and contributed in the development, struggle, and growth of this country's metamorphosis alongside one another. We would not be where or who we are today without one another. What this bill would enable is for our youth to gain a deeper and richer knowledge of how each communities' unique experiences in American society have strived to make our country better. The Mexican-American community paved our country's way to school desegregation leading up to Brown vs Board of Education. A Chinese-American man is responsible for the United States' principle of *jus soli* and how we proudly grant citizenship to all

born on our soil. Filipino Americans fought in the American Civil War that would declare enslaved people free. That is the beautiful truth of a multicultural social studies curriculum—by sharing the stories of each community, our students will grow to understand and embrace all communities.

If our youth and our community are not brought up with a multifaceted understanding of American history, they will be denied the opportunity to gain empathy for one another. We share our stories to share our humanity, our struggles, heartbreak, and jubilation. By listening, it opens our hearts up to resist judgment and jumping to conclusions about someone based only on our own assumptions and points of view. Knowing someone's story can prevent intolerance, rejection, resentment, and indifference. When our stories are rejected or erased, so too is the dignity of our voice and experiences. The question shouldn't be: why do we need to hear about these stories? The real question is—why won't we listen?

What I fear if we reject the opportunity to deepen our state's education on American history is that we will run the risk of history repeating itself. Within this new decade alone we see the United States suffer anti-Asian violence, anti-Semitic vandalism, anti-Palestinian violence, anti-Black shootings, and more. We cannot afford to ignore the humanity of communities vulnerable to attacks and hatred when lives are at risk. As writer John le Carré wrote in *A Man Most Wanted*, "Tomorrow was created yesterday, you see. That is the point I was making to you. And by the day before yesterday, too. To ignore history is to ignore the wolf at the door."

I respectfully urge the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee to consider my testimony and to vote yes in support of H.B. 171. Thank you for your time and the opportunity to testify in support of this legislation.