

Testimony for HB 171
Submitted by: Erin Fung
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 Erin Fung. I live in Cincinnati, and I am a professional orchestral musician, and an Educator with over 10 years of service as an adjunct faculty professor and administrator. 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 believe that passing this bill is good for Ohio and Ohio students because I am the daughter of immigrants, who emigrated to North America to seek a better life in this country for themselves and their descendants.

Through harmful immigration policies, Asians have at times been limited entry to America (Asian Exclusion Act), among other ethnic groups. Most recently, Asians have been vilified and antagonized during the COVID-19 pandemic, with leaders including the President of the United States using racist terms like 'Kung-Flu' and 'China Virus'. There have been a slew of attacks against Asians, especially our elders, that have been horrific and disturbing, and the increase in racially motivated hate across the country has risen dramatically in recent years. Now, with the rise of Antisemitism and Islamophobia, it is more important than ever to have educational materials that represent as many members of our community as possible, and highlight the strength in our cultural diversity. We must educate our youth so that they are not prejudiced against people solely on the basis of looking different, speaking different languages, and having a different culture. What nativists from all ages fail to recognize is that not too many years before a new wave of immigrants arrive, many of their own ancestors were the new immigrants.

An updated model curriculum would provide rich, engaging options for teaching and learning social studies in Ohio. It will equip teachers with activities and lessons that can support and develop respect for the students in our classrooms who come from different backgrounds than our own. Students are also more engaged when they see their communities reflected in the classroom. It's important that our students can connect to the information that they're learning in school.

A 2020 study from the National Education Association shows us that students of color, in particular, who participated in courses that reflected different identities, cultures, and backgrounds had a greater sense of belonging and sense of self. H.B. 171 takes advantage of the existing curriculum review process, providing options and enriching the guidance used by our education experts to continue developing the best curriculum for Ohio's students.

We fail our kids when we don't provide them with an education that truly mirrors Ohio's current makeup as a state. H.B. 171 can solve for that by educating students about the experiences, migration, and contributions of a range of communities that already, and in many cases, have long called Ohio home.

H.B. 171 has the backing and support of the vast majority of Ohio teachers, with endorsements from Ohio Education Association, Ohio Federation of Teachers, and Ohio Council of the Social Studies.

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.

Thank you,

Erin Fung