

**Testimony for H.B. 171
Submitted by Tessa Xuan
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 Tessa Xuan, and I live in Cleveland. I am a Chinese American who grew up attending Ohio public schools, and I recently became a mother to my 4-month-old daughter. I am asking this committee to support H.B. 171 which updates the Social Studies model curriculum to include the migration histories, contributions, and experiences of a range of communities who call Ohio home.

I grew up in Ohio, and I've chosen to raise my family in Ohio. My daughter Yuna is mixed (Chinese and Pakistani), and she is American. She is an Ohioan just like her mom and dad, her grandparents, and her great-grandparents.

I spent a large part of my childhood living in Sandusky, Ohio – attending the Perkins Local School District, where there were no other faces like mine in the classroom. I had a great education, but I was never taught that for generations before mine, Asian immigrants had come to the U.S. and contributed to the nation. In fact, throughout my schooling, I didn't learn anything about Asian Americans at all. Americans who look like me were so absent from the curriculum that in elementary school, my fellow classmates assumed I must be Mexican.

As a result of this invisibility, I didn't know there was a way to be proud of my family and where I came from and still be an American. Throughout my childhood, I internalized feelings of shame and embarrassment about my heritage and identity, which were often reduced to harmful stereotypes.

Later in 2015, when I was a young professional living in Cincinnati, I found out about the recent suicide of a 13-year-old girl named Emilie Olsen. Emilie had been adopted from China by a white family, and she had endured months of racially motivated bullying while attending Fairfield City Schools. I felt an immediate connection to Emilie's story, her family's grief, and her tragic death. Since then, her memory has motivated me to work toward a future where all children can feel safety and belonging regardless of their race.

I believe that passing H.B. 171 is good for Ohio and Ohio students because our social studies curriculum should mirror Ohio's existing population, including the many communities who call Ohio home. Let's be very clear; H.B. 171 is *not* a bill about foreign history. This bill is about *American* history and it is about *Ohio* history.

Seeking out information about Asian American history and the histories of other groups in America has been incredibly meaningful for me as an adult. I now feel pride in my heritage as well as a connection to many people who have shaped and been shaped by U.S. history. I remember when I was a student I disliked history class, where it sometimes felt like we were just memorizing a series of dates that had no connection to our society and the world we live in today. Students are so much more engaged when they see their communities reflected in the classroom, and it's important to me that my daughter Yuna will be able to connect to the information that she learns in school.

We need to build upon the many important historical events that are already being taught in Ohio classrooms and update the model curriculum to make sure that our students are fully prepared for Ohio's future. Our histories are deeply interconnected, and a curriculum that excludes the experiences of all the groups listed in H.B. 171 is failing our students by presenting an incomplete picture of Ohio's past and how we made it to the present. Hearing these stories illuminates the historical forces that have shaped our country, our state, and all of our lives in countless ways – while helping our children gain a greater sense of empathy and respect for their friends and neighbors of different backgrounds.

While families often pass down knowledge from generation to generation, it should not fall upon individual children to ask these questions, or upon individual parents to tell these stories. For many children, that simply isn't an option. They may have been adopted by parents of a different race. If they are mixed race (a population in Ohio which [nearly tripled](#) between 2010 and 2020), they may not have the same connections or access to every part of their heritage. Their parents may be immigrants or refugees with limited knowledge about American history, or their parents may not have learned about important aspects of our history when they themselves were children attending Ohio schools. Or, they may be part of a family like mine, in which language barriers, cultural differences, and generational trauma were often obstacles to talking about the past.

An updated model curriculum would provide rich, engaging options for teaching and learning social studies in Ohio. Our teachers work hard, and they need easier access to sample curricula, trainings, and resources to support them in providing a welcoming learning environment to all students. This is precisely why H.B. 171 has earned the backing and support of the vast majority of Ohio teachers, including the 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 share my story in support of this legislation which will ensure our kids can all see themselves reflected in their education.