

April 22, 2025

Testimony in Support of LD 957 - An Act to Integrate Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander History into the Statewide System of Learning Results

Good afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity to speak today. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Grace Valenzuela, resident of Cumberland, Maine. I came to Maine in 1986 from the Philippines and have worked in Portland Public Schools since then first as a teacher, a teacher leader, and as a director of the English and Foreign Language Development Programs. Currently, I am the Executive Director of Communications and Family/Community Partnerships.

I moved to Maine with hope and determination — drawn by the values of community, opportunity, and education that this state upholds. Over the years, I have dedicated myself to supporting students and families from all backgrounds, helping them feel seen, heard, and valued in our schools.

Today, I speak in strong support of *An Act to Integrate Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander History into the Statewide System of Learning Results* — legislation that would bring long-overdue representation into Maine's classrooms.

As an Asian American educator, I have seen first-hand how powerful it is when students see themselves reflected in the curriculum. It validates their identity. It affirms their place in our shared story. And it fosters empathy among their peers. For many students of AAPI heritage in Maine — whose families may be one of only a few in their towns — that representation is not just meaningful; it is essential.

Sadly, most of us grew up learning little, if anything, about the role that Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders have played in American history — in labor movements, science and technology, the arts, public service, and civil rights. We did not learn about Filipino veterans of World War II who fought under the American flag. We did not hear about Chinese immigrants who helped build the transcontinental railroad. We did not know about Japanese Americans who were interned during World War II or Pacific Islanders whose lands and lives were impacted by U.S. policy.

These stories are not just "AAPI stories" — they are American stories. And our students deserve to learn them. This is not just about inclusion — it's about accuracy. It's about ensuring that every student in our state, regardless of background, learns a complete and truthful version of our collective story.

By passing this bill, we have the chance to affirm the dignity and identity of thousands of AAPI students and families across our state. Representation in the curriculum promotes a sense of

belonging, fosters cross-cultural understanding, and helps all students develop the critical thinking skills they need to engage thoughtfully with the world around them.

By passing this bill, the State of Maine has the opportunity to lead with inclusion and integrity. We can give our students the gift of a fuller, more accurate, and more inspiring education. We can show every child in Maine — whether they trace their roots to Portland or to the Pacific — that their history matters.

Thank you for your time, and thank you for your commitment to making education in Maine more inclusive, truthful, and just.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'gvalenzuela', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Grace Valenzuela

valeng@portlandschools.org

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Cumberland
LD 957

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