

Ophelia Hu Kinney
Scarborough
LD 957

Good afternoon, Representative Murphy and esteemed members of the Committee On Education and Cultural Affairs:

My name is Ophelia Hu Kinney. I live in Scarborough, and I'm here to urge your strong support for LD 957, "An Act to Integrate Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander History into the Statewide System of Learning Results."

I'm a parent of a multiracial Asian American toddler, a committed community member, a faith leader, and a nonprofit communications professional.

In my lines of work, context is a form of currency. Who we become, individually and as a society, depends in part on the stories we tell about ourselves.

Who are we as a nation? Who are we as a state? Likely, many of you were taught a version of American history like I was... that there is a default history and then there are "other" strands of history.

But in passing LD 957, Mainers stand to gain a grasp of broader history. This bill is not about rewriting history—it is about telling a more complete story.

Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander communities are woven through the fabric of this nation—helping build railroads, defending our country in times of war, leading social justice movements, advancing innovation in science and the arts, and shaping American culture and democracy. These stories are not footnotes. They form a critical weave in the fabric of our national tapestry.

For most of my life, Asian American history was a month-long observance or a paragraph in a textbook. This reinforced for me the idea that my people's histories and contributions did not matter. It deprives students of language and setting for their lives. It made it easier for others in my community to conceive of Asian Americans as less American, less multidimensional, less relatable.

In 2020, when many faith communities were meeting on Zoom for worship, my own faith community was Zoom-bombed twice by strangers who came online to personally target me with derogatory language and threats of physical harm because I'm a visible Asian American person in leadership. Asian Americans around the country saw a resurgence of xenophobia and violence. And we experienced that resurgence here in Maine, too.

That's not the kind of Maine I want my Asian American child to grow up in. And it's not the kind of Maine I want her peers to grow up in. Maine's Asian American population is growing. They deserve representation and an accurate portrayal of history. And their non-Asian counterparts deserve all the same as well.

LD 957 would ensure that Asian American history and contributions are included in the Statewide System of Learning Results—just as we have done with African American studies and Wabanaki studies.

This legislation is about educational excellence and accurate historical representation. It's also a concrete step toward the cultivation of empathy.

I urge this committee, and the full legislature, to pass LD 957 and to move us closer to a future where every student can learn more about our collective history.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to Maine's children.