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April 22, 2025

*Testimony of Representative Laurie Osher in support of*  
**LD 957, An Act to Integrate Asian American, Native Hawaiian and  
Pacific Islander History into the Statewide System of Learning  
Results**

*Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs*

Good afternoon, Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. I am Laurie Osher, and I represent House District 25 in Orono. Thank you for the opportunity to speak as a cosponsor in support of **LD 957, An Act to Integrate Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander History into the Statewide System of Learning Results**.

I'm a Jewish American, born in the years after WWII into the cohort of Americans called the Baby Boomers. I was born and raised in the Philadelphia area, in a suburb where at least a third and perhaps half the residents were Jewish. Along the main street, there were not just churches on every other block; there were synagogues, too. In Sunday school, our curriculum included learning about the Holocaust. We learned about the way the Nazi government violated the rights of their citizens who were Jews - first preventing them from attending school or working in their workplaces and then rounding them up and sending them to internment and death camps created by the Nazi Government. I also learned about the anti-immigrant laws that had been created in the US in the 1920s and limited the number of Jews who could come to the US. It was because of these laws so many Jews attempting to escape Nazi death camps were turned away from the US.

I didn't learn this in public school. Many decades later, at least the bit about the death camps is part of the public school curriculum.

I also didn't learn anything about the history of Asian Americans or Pacific Islanders and their experiences, their successes, and the ways they have contributed to the making of America.

I first learned about the contributions of Chinese Americans in building the railroad and other infrastructure in California when I moved to Northern California to work for the Forest Service when I was 28 years old. I worked in Big Bar - population 200. The closest town was Weaverville. It was sparsely populated when I was there, maybe a few thousand in a 30-mile radius, but in the 1800s, the area was teeming with gold miners and woods workers and railroad builders and people managing the booming business of lumber, prospecting and the associated development of the transportation networks. This was far northern California, in the mountains, the coast range, near the Oregon border. Big Bar is in California's equivalent to Maine's unorganized territory.

There was a small state park in Weaverville: The Joss House State Historic Park. A Taoist Temple located there, built in 1874, is the oldest continuously used Chinese temple in California. The park has information about the Chinese community that thrived when Weaverville was booming. The fact that there were lots of Chinese people in the US in the 1800s was news to me.

Wouldn't it have been great if my public school, then considered one of the best school districts in the country, had educated me about the Chinese who built the railroads in the west and then were the first group to be impacted by anti-immigrant laws - in particular, the Chinese Exclusion Act? (The Chinese were the first to be limited by the ugly anti-immigrant fervor that has welled up in the US from time to time.)

After my stint in Big Bar, CA, I went to graduate school in Berkeley to complete a PhD in the study of the importance of Soils Organic Matter Sequestration for slowing the accumulation of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere. I received a grant to study soil surface chemistry and the mechanisms of soil organic matter sequestration and loss, specifically soil organic matter and mineral interactions.

Prior to studying the interactions, I needed to collect the soil. To get soils formed from volcanic ash, I was headed to Hilo, Hawaii. A researcher in my department suggested I contact his brother when I got to Hilo. His brother was the Dean at the University of Hawaii at Hilo. What does this have to do with if Maine has a requirement for an Asian American studies curriculum?

These two brothers, both excellent scientists, had been raised on a farm in California until they and their families had been interned in concentration camps during WWII by the American government because their parents were immigrants from Japan and because they were Japanese

Americans. They shared with me their stories about living in the camps and about the fact that their dad was serving in the US military at the same time.

I was shocked to learn that, during WWII, my own country had limited the rights of citizens, kicked Japanese American children out of school, prohibited the Japanese American adults from working - but not from serving in the military - and interned whole families in camps. I was shocked that even my community, the Jews who were so concerned about teaching their children about the horrors of the holocaust that they made sure to teach it in Sunday school, hadn't had the knowledge of what the US did to its own citizens - other immigrants who had come to the US to make a better life for their children.

I'm pleased to say that when discussing this upcoming bill with my 11-year-old neighbor this weekend, he informed me that his teacher, Debbie White, one of the many excellent social studies teachers in the Orono schools, just taught his class about the treatment of Japanese Americans by the US government during WWII. But as we know, while this information is available in Mrs. White's class and to some children in other classrooms in Maine, it isn't being shared with all our children because we don't require it.

Maine's school curriculum should include how past and present practices have disadvantaged the Asian Americans in Maine and the US and how Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have contributed important discoveries, leadership, and excellence.

I encourage you to vote Ought to Pass on LD 957.