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Testimony of Representative Ellie Sato presenting
**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 Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Ellie Sato, and I represent House District 109, which includes part of Gorham. I'm proud to be here to present **LD 957, An Act to Integrate Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander History into the Statewide System of Learning Results**.

This bill would do just as its title states, integrate Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, or AANHPI History into our state's K-12 learning results. During the next learning results review, the following subjects would be considered, but not mandated:

- The history of AANHPI in this state, New England, and in the United States;
- The contributions of AANHPI leaders who advanced civil rights from the 19th century to the present day;
- The contributions of AANHPI individuals in government, the arts, humanities and sciences; and
- The contributions of AANHPI communities to the economic, cultural, social, and political development of the United States.

This bill would also direct the Department of Education to form a volunteer advisory group to collect information and prepare materials for teaching on this subject matter. The group would include scholars in this area, members of AANHPI organizations, the State Archivist, and members of the public with personal experience to inform the collection and preparation of these materials.

To illustrate why this bill is necessary, I would like to take us back to March of 2020 when the entire world shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While we were quickly transitioning to shelter-in-place and social distancing policies, I remember seeing news clips of fellow Asian-Americans experiencing violence and hatred. It was not uncommon to hear COVID-19 called the “Wuhan virus” or the “Chinese virus.” According to the Anti-Asian Hate Crime Report in 2021, hate crimes against Asian-Americans surged by 145% nationally in 2020.¹ One in six Asian American adults across the country experienced a hate crime or hate incident in 2021, which was an increase from one in eight in 2020.² Eight out of 10 Asian Americans have experienced bullying either online or in-person, with 60% of incidents involving Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander youth – under the age of 17 – being bullied by adults.³ Maine was not immune from this trend.⁴ Many Asian-American Mainers felt the widespread fear of violence as a result of the pandemic’s rhetoric⁵, especially as hate crimes against Asian-Americans increased in the state⁶. Sadly, we won’t know the full extent of this change because hate crimes against AANHPI are often unreported due to a culturally-based distrust in government.

By including information on the history and contributions of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders in our schools here in Maine, we are working toward preventing future violence against AANHPI individuals from occurring. The 2022 Report of the Social Tracking of Asian Americans in the U.S. found, through data analysis of a survey conducted, that education is the highest recommended solution to combat anti-Asian racism.⁷ They also found that there are significant gaps in knowledge around AANHPI history. When asked, “When you think about the history and experience of Asian Americans in this country, what significant events or policies come to mind?” 42% of respondents said “don’t know” and 46% of respondents reported that they were “not at all familiar” with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882⁸ or other restrictions on immigrants from Asia. This is a deeply concerning statistic, especially since the Chinese Exclusion Act is an integral part of American History. By including AANHPI history and contributions in Maine’s curriculum, we directly combat anti-Asian American stereotypes, including the longstanding belief that Asian Americans are not ‘real Americans.’

¹ <https://www.csusb.edu/sites/default/files/FACT%20SHEET-%20Anti-Asian%20Hate%202020%20rev%203.21.21.pdf>

² <https://aapidata.com/blog/year-after-atlanta/>

³ <https://acttochange.org/bullyingreport/>

⁴ <https://wgme.com/news/local/asian-americans-in-maine-concerned-by-increase-in-hate-crimes-during-pandemic>

⁵ <https://wgme.com/news/local/asian-americans-in-maine-concerned-by-increase-in-hate-crimes-during-pandemic>

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<https://www.newscentermaine.com/article/news/local/asian-american-hate-crimes-maine-fbi-lincoln-county-sheriffs-office/97-433c5eee-2b40-4e41-b93c-ef6b84d5fa7d>

⁷ <https://staatus-index.s3.amazonaws.com/STAATUS%20Index%202022%20Report.pdf>

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<https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/chinese-exclusion-act#:~:text=In%20the%20spring%20of%201882,immigrating%20to%20the%20United%20States.>

There are many cost-effective and free resources available that educators can turn to related to AANHPI history. The Asian American Education Project⁹ have created over 75 K-12 lesson plans, and provide free, virtual professional development workshops. Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) published a docuseries called Asian Americans,¹⁰ for which the Asian American Education Project has developed 36 lesson plans. The South Asian American Digital Archive also provides free virtual professional development workshops.¹¹ Make Us Visible, a national organization that supports state chapters, including Maine's chapter, has developed free K-5 coloring books and a K-8 booklist that can be found on their website.¹² This bill would take that next step by ensuring that our schools are aware of these resources, and that they are accessible to educators.

By passing this legislation, we would be joining seven other states that have enshrined AANHPI studies in state law with bipartisan support, including Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Florida.¹³ We have an opportunity to follow their lead, and say that we are willing to stand up to anti-Asian hate and violence. Ensuring that AANHPI studies are in our curriculum is a matter of public safety, and ensuring that the next generation understands how AANHPI are part of our history, present, and future.

Before I take questions, I would like to make clear that I am here to support LD 1202 and LD 1474 as well. The sponsors of these bills, Sen. Talbot Ross, Rep. Osher, and I have been working together in coalition to ensure the passage of our individual bills. Structurally, each of these three bills are requiring different infrastructure to support implementation, because each subject matter requires a different, incremental next step in the process. Each of these bills works to serve marginalized communities that have been ignored for far too long, but to merge the bills would be to undermine the logistical purpose of each bill. In the context of the budget, merging these bills, or any two of these bills, to lower the fiscal note would have the impact of compromising the true intention of each bill.

Thank you for your consideration, and I would be happy to answer any questions.

⁹ <https://asianamericanedu.org/>

¹⁰ <https://mainepublic.pbsllearningmedia.org/collection/asian-americans-pbs/>

¹¹ <https://www.saada.org/>

¹² <https://makeusvisible.org/resources>

¹³ Illinois, New Jersey, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Florida, Delaware, and Wisconsin have each passed Asian American history requirements over the past 3 years.