

Dear Esteemed Members of the Alaska Legislature,

We, the undersigned Asian American and Pacific Islander community-based organizations and ally organizations in Alaska, submit this letter to you to voice our strong support of SB 131, requiring the inclusion of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) history in our state's K-12 classrooms. Requiring the contributions, histories, and experiences of AAPIs serves as a long-term preventive measure against anti-Asian American and Pacific Islander bullying, violence, and hate, which we have seen proliferate over the past few years.

According to Act to Change, a national public awareness campaign on bullying prevention among youth, 8 in 10 Asian Americans have experienced bullying either online or in-person, with 60% of incidents involving Asian American and Pacific Islander youth (0-17 years old) being bullied by adults. In a report by AAPI Data, 1 in 6 Asian American adults across the country experienced a hate crime or hate incident in 2021. Regardless of your background, including who you are and what you look like, we believe every American has a right to feel safe whether they are at school, their place of work or worship, the grocery store, or walking around their own neighborhood. Today, too many Asian American and Pacific Islander families have had their sense of safety ripped away.

We believe education is an important solution in combating this rise in anti-Asian American and Pacific Islander hate. In a national study by STAATUS, Social Tracking of Asian Americans in the U.S., education is the most recommended solution overall to combating anti-Asian American racism.

Examples of history that should be taught include:

- Thelma Buchholdt, the first female Filipino American legislator elected to the Alaska House of Representatives in 1974 and served four consecutive terms through 1982 representing Anchorage, she was also the first Filipino legislator elected to a United States legislative body with a constituency of less than 3% Asian American and less than 1% Filipino American.

- Cannery workers, primarily Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, as well as Korean, Mexican, and Black Americans, who helped propel salmon canning into Alaska's largest industry in the first half of the 20th century. An example is Kake Cannery, which today is a national historic landmark.
- Silme Domingo and Gene Viernes, co-founders of the Alaska Cannery Workers Association, a civil rights organization that pursued legal action against the discriminatory practices of Alaska canneries, in which Filipino American, Anglo American, and Indigenous workers were paid, treated and housed differently based on their race.
- The Stedman-Thomas Historic District, one of the earliest neighborhoods in “Alaska’s first city,” Ketchikan, which was a melting pot of Filipino, Japanese and Chinese laborers who were an integral part of the city’s fisheries industry and would eventually establish most of the first businesses along Stedman Street.
- Ikua Purdy and his cousins Archie Ka‘au‘a and Jack Low, three paniolos (Hawaiian cowboys), who competed in 1908 at Frontier Days, the largest rodeo in the world, in Cheyenne, Wyoming. Purdy won first place in the steer-roping world championship finals, with Ka‘au‘a coming in second. During the competition, Low had an asthma attack but still placed sixth. In 1999, more than 90 years after he won his championship, Purdy was inducted into the National Rodeo Hall of Fame.
- The Chinese Exclusion Act and the 1924 Johnson-Reed Immigration Act that prevented immigration from Asia, with the exception of the Philippines, a U.S. territory, and was the first law of its kind to restrict immigration.
- Larry Itliong who organized with Cesar Chavez, convincing the National Farm Workers Association, which were primarily made up of Mexican farmworkers, and the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee, primarily made up of Filipino farmworkers, to organize and join forces for the Delano farm workers grape strike. As a result of their efforts, workers were able to negotiate better pay, benefits, and protections.
- An all-Japanese American unit from WWII, the 442nd is the most decorated unit for its size and length of service in American military history. Known for rescuing the “Lost Battalion” among several other heroic feats, the unit, totaling about 18,000 men, received over 4,000 Purple Hearts, 4,000 Bronze Stars, 560 Silver Star Medals, 21 Medals of

Honor, and seven Presidential Unit Citations. Despite having families in incarceration camps due to President Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066, these men answered the call to serve their country.

The passage of SB 131 and the subsequent codification of AAPI history will lead to increased acceptance and understanding for Americans of Asian and Pacific Islander ancestry. For AAPI students specifically, it will bolster their mental health and sense of belonging in the state they call home. For all Alaskans, this law would foster a stronger sense of community and shared history, underlining the struggles and values that connect all of us as Americans.

Failure to take action on this important issue will result in the further proliferation of anti-Asian American and Pacific Islander bullying, bias, and violence. SB 131 presents an opportunity to confront the pervasive stereotype of the 'perpetual foreigner' that has been the root of this hate. Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders across Alaska want to be seen as community members and neighbors, not foreigners or threats. This bill takes our state a step in the right direction at a time when geopolitical tensions are worsening, leading to increased hate against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders over the coming years. This is an urgent issue that cannot wait.

Please take action.

Sincerely,



Make Us Visible Alaska
Interim Director
Shayne Nuesca
3/13/2024



Polynesian Association of
Alaska
Executive Director
Lusiana T. Hansen
3/14/2024



Mana
Community Engagement Lead
Pearl-Grace Pantaleone
4/2/2024



People of Oceania Association
President
Fotokalafi Vea
4/8/2024



Pacific Community of Alaska
Executive Director
Tafilisaunoa Toleafoa
4/8/2024



Filipino American National
Historical Society - Alaska
Chapter
President
Quint Bagcal
4/9/2024



Filipino Community of
Anchorage Alaska, Inc.
President
Lorna H. Garcia
4/9/2024



AAPI Student Club -
University of Alaska Southeast
Campus Club Advisor
Mae Delcastillo
4/12/2024



Consular Outreach Mission
Alaska
Secretary
Kenneth Cramer
4/12/2024



Filipino Community Inc.
President
Edric Carrillo
4/15/2024



Native Movement
Executive Director
Enei Begaye
4/16/2024



UTOPIA AK
President
Tifaimoana Aiava
4/16/2024



Korean American Community
of Anchorage
President
Andy Kwon
4/17/2024



Ketchikan Wellness Coalition
Strengthening Cultural Unity
Task Force Coordinator
Alma Manabat Parker
4/19/2024



Sealaska Heritage Institute
President
Rosita Worl
4/19/2024



Elder
Della Cheney
4/20/2024



Mat-Su Kabayan
Vice President
Lhing McNeal
4/20/2024



Asian Alaskan Cultural Center
President
Leticia Tadina
4/22/2024



Haa Tóoch Lichéesh
Prevention and Outreach
Director
Ati Nasiah
4/22/2024