

SUSAN C. LEE  
Legislative District 16  
Montgomery County

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*Chair*

Maryland Legislative Asian American  
and Pacific Islander Caucus

*President Emeritus*

Women Legislators of the  
Maryland General Assembly, Inc.



James Senate Office Building  
11 Bladen Street, Room 223  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
410-841-3124 · 301-858-3124  
800-492-7122 Ext. 3124  
Susan.Lee@senate.state.md.us

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

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## Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

### **Senate Bill 888 – FAVORABLE – Education- American Studies and Social Equity Standards Advisory Board – Academic Standards and Model Policy**

Senate bill 888 establishes an American Studies and Social Equity Standards Advisory Board with the purpose of identifying ethnic and social groups whose contributions and perspectives are not currently often told in Maryland public school American studies. The Board is to create model policy on the studies of these groups to be adopted by the Maryland Board of Education by 2025. This bill is different than Senator Lam's bill and my more comprehensive bill covering multiple groups of underrepresented American groups in our history, but it hits on the same note, Asian American history is being neglected in our schools.

I am cross-filing this bill at the request of the House sponsor Delegate Qi. There were some initial promises made about sponsoring Asian American curriculum bills, but there were divergent strategies to get to the solution. This is the most nuanced of the bills, and therefore perhaps the most challenging to pass as law. The other bills provide less guardrails on the development of the curriculum.

This specific legislative effort is based on data requested about the curriculum in all local school systems over the interim, in which 14 jurisdictions responded about Asian American history taught in their jurisdictions. Some feedback included lessons about Indian or Chinese history as if they didn't understand the concept of Asian Americans. Moreover, the guidelines are bare in this subject matter, as it seems there isn't much worth teaching about Asian Americans according to the high school United States history framework. The middle school framework only mentions them in the bridge unit when their indicator and objective is to describe the impact of

geographic expansion on rights for African Americans, Chinese immigrants, and the political and legal rights to women. But that objective is not even assessed until high school. Then high school merely touches on the economic consequences of WWII on these groups, but again at the granular level of what local school systems actually teach about these groups, it is unclear if they cover these topics to any depth whatsoever.

Notably, and different from the other similar legislation in this space that you have heard this year, SB 888 creates an advisory board to examine current academic standards related to United States history. Examination is meant to find omissions of pertinent historical contributions or voices of ethnic or social groups. As defined, ethnic group means a nondominant racial or ethnic group (to include groups of individuals who identify as indigenous and/or of African, Asian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic, Latino, or Middle eastern decent) and social group means women, those with disabilities, members of the LGBTQIA community, immigrants, and refugees.

Upon identification, the board is intended to create academic standard for each grade level that will increase exposure to the contributions and voices of these groups. Inclusion of these contributions and perspectives is meant to not only expand a child's understanding of American history, but to allow for the exploration of communities with whom students will likely interact with during their years of study in Maryland.

The advisory board is to develop a model policy on ethnic and social equity in schools that allow for a safe environment in which students learn about the ethnic and social groups, some of which they may be a part. The safety of students exploring such topics is paramount as we strive to combat biases and challenge prejudices, assumptions, and attitudes. The advisory board model policy shall include the maintaining of communication with parents and invitation to voice concerns about student's experiences related to racial or social identity. Of importance is the parents religious or cultural concerns and the advisory board is intended to heed such concerns when developing policy.

Policy is also to be created to ensure faculty are trained in best practices when dealing with racially motivated incidents. Misconduct based upon ethnic or social group is to be met with appropriate, model policy approved disciplinary action.

Additionally, this bill sets out who is to be included in the advisory board. A diverse selection of individuals includes not just heads of education departments and associations, but individuals mirroring Maryland demographics. The represented communities include Native Americans, black and African Americans, Hispanic and Latino, disability rights, the LGBTQIA, and additional members.

Finally, the vacancy procedure is outlined to ensure that the board remains representative of Maryland demographics and does not become over represented by any community nor underrepresented of any community.

For these reasons, I request favorable report on SB888.