

September 9, 2025

Honorable Tom Cole
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Member Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Tom Cole and Ranking Member Rosa DeLauro,

As you prepare to markup the Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies (CJS) Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2026, we the undersigned organizations urge members to strike language directing the Department of Justice (DOJ) to effectively reinstate the National Security Division (NSD)'s "China Initiative." This problematic language, located in the CJS Subcommittee draft materials for the FY2026 bill, directs the DOJ's National Security Division to reestablish an office dedicated to countering espionage and influence efforts against perceived threats from the PRC. In reality, this provision would target scholars, scientists, and academics with any perceived connections with China. We urge our leaders to remove this section and oppose any reinstatement of the "China Initiative" or any iterations. If the bill proceeds through to conference, we also urge you not to include this or similar language referring to the China Initiative in any Joint Explanatory statement or final agreement.

Under the China Initiative, concerns of federal agencies profiling and targeting Asian American scholars, scientists, and researchers based on their race, ethnicity, national origin, and/or religious beliefs over the past decade intensified. The program was launched in 2018 with the alleged purpose of combating economic espionage and trade secret theft. While there are legitimate concerns about the activities of the People's Republic of China (PRC) government, the PRC government has been conflated with people of Chinese origin or ancestry, including U.S. citizens. The United States has a long and dark history of scapegoating Asian Americans as "perpetual foreigners" and "threats," from the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 to the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II, and the racist rhetoric spread by government officials about the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic. We urge you to reject any such attempt to scapegoat the Asian American community.

Many of our organizations welcomed the DOJ's review and termination of the flawed "China Initiative" in 2022, and recognized this as a crucial step towards addressing the historic and long standing concerns of bias against and profiling of Asian Americans. Reinstating the "China Initiative" or any iteration would be a dangerous step back, reversing the progress made to address these civil rights concerns. Moreover, the "China Initiative" diverted crucial resources away from investigating national security threats and economic espionage to instead focus on people who had a "nexus to China." Even former U.S. Attorney Andrew Lelling, who prosecuted "China Initiative" cases, conceded that the program "lost its focus." This misguided approach led to costly, time consuming, and abusive investigations and prosecutions of Asian American scholars and researchers, who were not suspected of being PRC or CCP agents or threats to the national security or economic well-being of the United States, but rather engaging in everyday academic research.

The increasing scrutiny of scientists, researchers, and scholars, along with xenophobic and anti-China rhetoric from government officials, have further fueled anti-Asian hate and violence against Asian

Americans, as well as divisions in the workplace across the country. The “China Initiative” further created a chilling effect for Asian American scholars and scientists for fear of prosecution, deterring them from engaging in normal activities such as applying for federal grants, conducting research, or even traveling with family. A [report published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences \(PNAS\)](#) by Asian American Scholar Forum scientists shed light on the widespread fear experienced by scientists of Chinese descent in the U.S. during the course of their routine research and academic activities. In that report, 89% of respondents said they would like to contribute to the U.S. leadership in science and technology, but 72% feel unsafe in the U.S. and 61% feel pressure to leave the U.S. Professors were deterred from normal activities with 42% feeling fearful of conducting research, and 45% intending to avoid federal grant applications, especially senior faculty, mainly due to fear.

Terminating the “China Initiative” was a critical step towards alleviating this chilling effect and rebuilding trust between the Asian American and scholar community and our government to the benefit of all. Reinstating the “China Initiative” or any similar program would impede this process and exacerbate the existing chilling effect, discouraging talented scholars and scientists from contributing to U.S. scientific innovation, and may result in significant loss of talent. This would hamper America’s scientific progress and innovation, and hurt our country’s ability to remain a global leader in science and technology, to the detriment of all.

Furthermore, the “China Initiative” irreparably harmed the lives of many Chinese American scholars, including Drs. Anming Hu and Gang Chen. Dr. Anming Hu was indicted and arrested on February 27, 2020 under the China Initiative. The government accused Dr. Hu of wire fraud and making false statements. Following a mistrial, in July 2021 the government attempted to retry Dr. Hu, but the federal judge dismissed all counts against Dr. Hu and acquitted him on all charges on Sept. 9, 2021. In 2021, FBI agents raided the home of and arrested Dr. Gang Chen, a widely respected mechanical engineering professor and nanotechnologist at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The government accused Dr. Chen of federal grant fraud. Dr. Chen was the subject of a yearlong investigation under the “China Initiative.” Like many other Asian American scientists and researchers, Dr. Chen had his “loyalty” questioned during a press conference and was scapegoated as a national security threat. Dr. Chen’s arrest galvanized a whole country leading to calls of “We Are All Gang Chen.” In January 2022, the DOJ dropped all charges against Dr. Chen, but according to Dr. Chen, “[f]or 371 days, [his] family and [him] went through a living hell.” The House has previously attempted to reinstate the “China Initiative” through the appropriations process, and was met with strong opposition from a coalition of Asian American organizations and allied partners, as well as Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus leaders who aptly called out the dangers of any reinstatement, and the House removed the reinstatement language from the final bill.

We must ensure that we do not repeat the harms done to Drs. Gang Chen, Anming Hu, and many others targeted under the “China Initiative,” and reject any similar programs. Not only is this in keeping with our American values of freedom from discrimination and pursuit of innovation, but also recognizes the tremendous contributions of Asian American scholars, who must not be collateral damage to U.S.-China tensions.

We urge you again to reject any bill that attempts to reinstate the “China Initiative” or any iterations, and call on our leaders to protect and advance the rights of Asian Americans in our country.

Best Regards,

1990 Institute

AAPI Equity Alliance
AAPI NJ
AAPI Youth Rising
AAPIs for Justice (SA, TX)
ACLU
American Community Media
American Federation of Teachers
APA Justice Task Force
API Council
APIA Vote-Michigan
Asian American Federal Employees for Nondiscrimination (AAFEN)
Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund
Asian American Midwest Progressives
Asian American Psychological Association
Asian American Scholar Forum
Asian Americans Advancing Justice (AAJC)
Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Atlanta
Asian Americans Advancing Justice | Chicago
Asian Americans Advancing Justice Southern California (AJSOCAL)
Asian Americans United
Asian Law Alliance
Asian Pacific Americans in Higher Education
Asian Pacific Islander Political Alliance (API PA)
Aurora Commons LLC
Brennan Center for Justice
Cambodia Town Inc.
CAPI USA
Chinese Culture Center of San Francisco
Chinese for Affirmative Action
Clearinghouse on Women's Issues
Committee of 100
Defending Rights & Dissent
DRUM - Desis Rising Up & Moving
Feminist Majority Foundation
Georgetown Center for Asian Law
Hate Is A Virus
Hmong Innovating Politics
Japanese American Citizens League
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Justice Is Global
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
Missouri Asian American Youth Foundation
NAFSA: Association of International Educators
National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health Association (NAAPIMHA)
National Asian Pacific American Bar Association (NAPABA)
National Asian Pacific American Families Allied for Substance Awareness and Harm Reduction
National Iranian American Council Action
National Organization for Women

National Pacific Islander Education Network
National Queer Asian American Pacific Islander
National Tongan American Society
New Mexico Asian Family Center (NMAFC)
NICOS Chinese Health Coalition
OCA-Asian Pacific American Advocates
OCA-Asian Pacific American Advocates, Greater Cleveland
OCA-Asian Pacific American Advocates (Greater Philadelphia Chapter)
OCA-Asian Pacific American Advocates Greater Seattle
OCA-Asian Pacific American Advocates Greater Tucson Chapter
OCA Colorado
OCA Columbus
OCA-CVC
OCA-Sacramento Chapter
OCA-San Mateo Chapter
OCA Silicon Valley
OCA-NY
OPAWL-Building AAPI Feminist Leadership
Pacific Asian Counseling Services
Peace Action
Peace Action New York State
Restore The Fourth
Rising Voices
Services, Immigrant Rights and Education Network (SIREN)
Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF)
South Asian Network
Stop AAPI Hate
Thai Community Development Center (Thai CDC)
Union of Concerned Scientists
United Chinese Americans (UCA)
Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility
Western States Center
Wind of the Spirit Immigrant Resource Center