



October 17, 2025

The Honorable Roger Wicker
Chairman
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mike Rogers
Chairman
Committee on Armed Services
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Wicker, Ranking Member Reed, Chairman Rogers, and Ranking Member Smith,

As the House and Senate reconcile their respective versions of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2026, the Asian American Scholar Forum (AASF) provides the following additional context on how the [SAFE Research Act](#) would hurt American competitiveness and impact Asian American scholars, scientists, and researchers, as well as the broader research community. We respectfully request that this provision be struck in the final conference agreement.

The Asian American Scholar Forum is a national non-profit, non-partisan organization that works to promote belonging, freedom, and equality for all. We are a leading national non-profit providing a voice for the Asian American scholar, scientific, and research community with Congress, the federal government, media, research institutions, the civil rights space, and the broader general public. AASF has provided critical expertise and data reporting on the talent pipeline, science & technology, anti-profiling, and research security issues, bridging scientific and academic expertise with the legal and civil rights community. Our members are prominent leaders from the National Academies of Engineering, Medicine, and Science, the American Academy of Arts & Sciences, as well as past and current university presidents, provosts, vice provosts, deans, associate deans, department chairs, and recipients of prestigious awards and honors.

To maintain US leadership in science and technology, we must endeavor to maintain the thriving research ecosystem that laid the foundation for American competitiveness and innovation. Critical to our research enterprise is our ability to attract and retain the best global talents, foster international collaborations, and reduce the chilling effect on the Asian American and broader research community. Unfortunately, the SAFE Research Act, while perhaps well intended, is misguided and would hurt our ability to compete. Moreover, this provision was not marked nor was an opportunity provided for debate. There are a number of sections in this provision that we would like to highlight as areas of concern, all of which would contribute to a chilling effect on American research and pose significant challenges for implementation.

First, the provision outlines that application would be for **five years prior**. This would effectively lead to retroactive punishment for past activities that may have been previously allowed or encouraged. This raises concerns of fairness and feasibility. We must avoid unjust retroactive punishment and instill systems that are implementable. Not only must these policies be implementable for both researchers and academic institutions, but also adaptable, providing opportunity for transition and improvements based on data and feedback. These transition periods allow federal agencies, academic institutions, and individuals to follow new and changing policies without being punished for past lawful activities or behaviors. We must acknowledge the rapidly changing environment that federal agencies, academic institutions, and individuals must adapt to and create a fair and just system.

Second, we are concerned with whether the provision would effectively **bar co-authorship** within the timeline provided. This would shift our historic approach on openness and isolate our scientists from the benefits of collaboration with scientists abroad. This would handicap our researchers here and leave us significantly disadvantaged compared to our competitors and adversaries.

Third, the provision is **overly broad**, including in its definition of terms such as "affiliation". The lack of clarity would raise questions for both researchers and academic institutions on whether any and all collaboration or partnerships abroad would be captured. Should this apply to every international program, conference, or engagement, there is genuine concern on not only the feasibility of compliance but also whether prohibiting such collaboration would undermine our country's interests.

Lastly, we caution that overly broad policies like this leave **room for arbitrary application and/or bias, both implicit and explicit**. This could lead to significant impact on Asian American scholars, scientists, and researchers, particularly of Chinese descent. In the past, we have seen a

reliance on scapegoating against Asian Americans. The unjust and insidious narrative of Asian Americans as “perpetual foreigners” who are disloyal and threats to our country pervaded our country, leading to harmful policies and a chilling effect on Asian Americans and the broader research community. Yet our American history shows us that Asian Americans have played such a critical role in improving the daily lives of all Americans from the ability to access WiFi everywhere to being able to have video calls with loved ones to being at the frontlines of hospitals across the country treating our sick. In order to safeguard these communities and honor their tremendous contributions to our country, we must ensure that misguided vague policies do not lead to their targeting and unjust scrutiny. If we do not create smart and nuanced policies, not only would there be a human cost, but also a harm to U.S. leadership in science and technology.¹ When our country lives up to its values, we not only do the right thing, but benefit all Americans.

As in our prior actions, we continue to support the implementation of NSPM-33 and look to past legislation such as the CHIPS and Science Act. We urge you to work towards genuine policies that would strengthen our research enterprise. We seek a commitment to our American values and following guiding principles on the importance of transparency, clarity, fairness, due process, and non-discrimination. At the core of American excellence and competitiveness is both building and maintaining trust in the American system to attract talents from around the world drawn to our country’s promise for freedom, justice, and liberty.

For the reasons stated above, we urge you to strike this provision. We thank you for your consideration and look forward to continuing to work towards a more prosperous future and thriving research environment for our country.

Sincerely,



Gisela P. Kusakawa
Executive Director, AASF

¹ Xie, et al., *Caught in the crossfire: Fears of Chinese–American scientists*, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, April 18, 2023. (A Proceedings of National Academy study featured in the Wall Street Journal obtained responses from 1,304 Chinese American researchers employed by U.S. universities. The study found that although 89% of the respondents would like to contribute to U.S. leadership in science and technology, 72% do not feel safe as an academic researcher with 42 percent feeling fearful of conducting research in the U.S. For those who do not feel safe, 67% of survey respondents pointed to fears of “US government investigations into Chinese-origin researchers”. Moreover, around 61 percent of the survey respondents felt pressure to leave the U.S., especially junior faculty and federal grant awardees, jeopardizing the next generation of talents in our country.)