

Ohio Democrats, Asian groups oppose ban on property sales to Chinese, other immigrants

Ohio Republicans want to prevent individuals and companies from adversarial countries like China, Cuba and Russia from owning property in the state

By **Jessie Balmert**
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Hongmei Li has dedicated her career to working with international faculty members, researchers and graduate students. But she fears those colleagues won't be welcome in Ohio because of a proposed law that she calls racist and discriminatory.

Ohio Republican lawmakers want to prevent individuals and companies from adversarial countries like China, Cuba and Russia from owning property in the state. House Bill 1 and Senate Bill 88, if enacted, would effectively ban permanent legal residents from these countries from owning homes and businesses in Ohio. U.S. citizens would not be affected.

Li, an associate professor at Miami University, said those bills resemble past discriminatory policies like the Alien Land Laws, which effectively prohibited Japanese immigrants from owning land after World War II, and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which was a sweeping Chinese immigration ban.

"These bills represent a step backward into the darker history of racism in America, rather than progress toward justice and inclusion," Li said. "HB 1 and SB 88 attempt to codify racial profiling into law."

Supporters say Ohio House Bill 1 is about national security

Supporters of the bill say the goal is to protect national security from bad actors living near military installations like Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. "The federal government can't counter all these threats on their own," said Rep. Angie King, R-Celina, who sponsored House Bill 1.

If the bill becomes law, those purchasing and selling land would have to file a statement with their county auditor saying they weren't violating the foreign adversary prohibition. County sheriffs would enforce the foreign property ownership ban if county auditors suspected wrongdoing.

"Ohio's Property Protection Act is about national security, period," King said in a statement, adding that 28 other states have passed some version of House Bill 1. "This bill provides needed protection to our communities, safeguards Ohio's military installations and critical infrastructure such as: oil refineries, electric generating and water treatment facilities, communications and transportation sectors."

Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost, a Republican, backs the proposal, writing in testimony that: "Ohio truly is 'the heart of it all.' This means we have a responsibility to secure sensitive properties, including military bases, airports and water treatment plants."

Opponents say House Bill 1 threatens employment and population growth

But opponents say the changes threaten job and population growth in [a state that needs both](#). Immigrants pay taxes, purchase property and start businesses in Ohio.

"These numbers should scare my colleagues who are pushing this hateful agenda," said Rep. Munira Abdullahi, D-Columbus. She added that Ohio has other ways to address national security concerns without targeting a specific group of law-abiding residents.

The Senate version of the bill would require existing residents and companies, such as Chinese [glassmaker Fuyao](#) in Moraine, to sell their businesses. Moraine City Manager Michael Davis testified that closing the business would eliminate thousands of Dayton-area jobs, swell the unemployment rolls and collapse the city's tax base.

"In Moraine, we know firsthand what it looks like when a major employer leaves. We lived through it in 2008," said Davis, referencing General Motors' closure of its Moraine plant. "We do not want to live through it again because of an unnecessary and destructive policy."

Gov. Mike DeWine [vetoed lawmakers' first attempt](#) to pass a similar ban on property ownership, saying it could have "unintended

economic development consequences." Ohio lawmakers [previously approved restrictions on individuals from foreign adversaries](#) owning farm land.

The latest versions have yet to receive a committee vote, but Rep. Juanita Brent, D-Cleveland, said she expects one is coming soon.

"It's House Bill 1," Brent said. "Hate, hate, hate, discrimination, racism have become the No. 1 priority for the House Republicans."