

A New Law Declaring the Nation's First Americans of Chinese Descent History Month Will Take Effect on July 23, 2023

A new law declaring Americans of Chinese descent History Month will take effect on July 23, 2023, making Washington the first state in the nation to do so.

BELLEVUE, WA, UNITED STATES, May 15, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- After a [four-year struggle](#), Washington State finally established January as Americans of Chinese Descent History Month, which is the first in the nation. On May 9th, Governor Jay Inslee signed SB 5000, the Americans of Chinese Descent History Month bill, into law. The bill's prime sponsor, Senator Keith Wagoner (R-Sedro Woolley), along with some of the bill's longtime supporters and advocates, attended the bill signing. The new law will take effect on July 23, 2023.



Gov. Inslee signs Senate Bill No. 5000, May 9, 2023. Relating to recognizing contributions of Americans of Chinese descent. Primary Sponsor: Sen. Wagoner

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Governor Jay Inslee

Governor Inslee stated at the bill signing, “The bill encourages public schools to educate students on this topic, which includes celebrating influential figures such as Bruce Lee and former Governor Gary Locke, and Emily Shi, who is here today, while also reflecting on the somber history of mistreatment and abuse that Chinese Americans endured here. This designation honors the hard work,

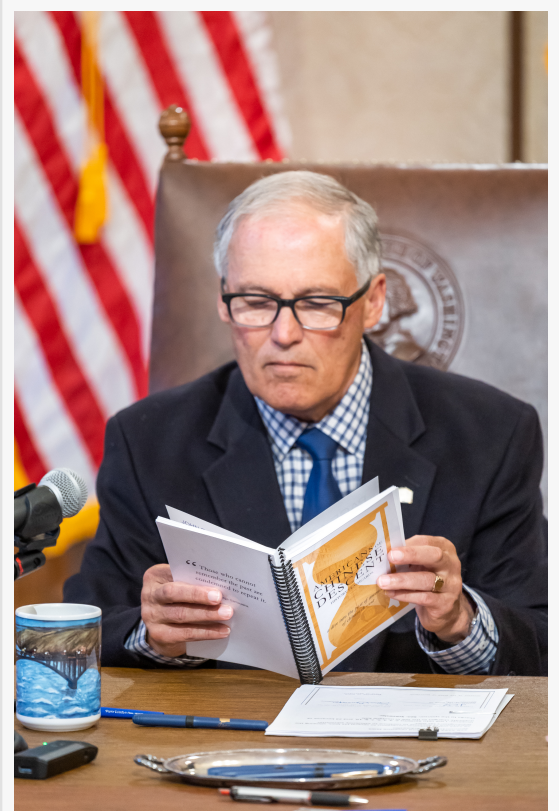
accomplishments, and generations of Chinese Americans in Washington – including new immigrants – and helps us celebrate Chinese culture and the contributions that helped shape this great state.” Emily Shi, a student at Lake Washington School District and a young advocate, has testified in support of Americans of Chinese Descent History Month at the Senate and House public hearings since 2021.

After the bill signing, The Overlake School student Ellie Yun presented Governor Inslee with a copy of the Americans of Chinese Descent History Flashcard that she and other middle and high school students independently put together during the summer of 2021.

First introduced by then-Republican Senator Hans Zeiger in 2020 as SB 6679, the local Americans of Chinese descent community desired a month dedicated to commemorating their history in Washington State and the United States, with the goal of fostering a sense of pride in their American roots among future generations. Senator Keith Wagoner reintroduced the bill as SB 5264 in 2021. The Americans of Chinese descent community did not anticipate that such a simple and inclusive bill would face so many obstacles and pushbacks in the Washington legislature. The bill missed the cutoff for a floor vote in the Senate in 2021. Then, in 2022, a final [36-hour political maneuver](#) by Reps. Cindy Ryu (D-Shoreline), My-Linh Thai (D-Bellevue), and Sharon Tomiko Santos (D-Seattle) effectively killed the bill in the House.

This year, Senator Wagoner introduced the bill again as SB 5000, the first measure introduced in the Senate for the 2023 regular legislative session. The Senate swiftly passed the bill by a vote of 48 to 0. After the bill was referred to the House State Government and Tribal Relations Committee on February 3, Rep. Sharon Tomiko Santos introduced HB 1759, Chinese American Month, on February 6. She subsequently used HB 1759 as leverage to exert pressure for an amendment to SB 5000 but ultimately voted against the amendment on the House floor.

Rep. Santos and her handful of recruited supporters claim that the term "Americans of Chinese Descent" should not be used to refer to all "Chinese Americans" because early immigrants, such as the Chinese railroad workers in the 19th century, were prohibited from naturalization. SB 5000's supporters, which include over 1,000 individuals from Rep. Santos' own district who physically signed the petition to establish January as Americans of Chinese Descent History Month and more than 100 individuals who signed up in support of the bill at the House public hearing, strongly disagree. In an email to the House committee, Linda Yang, Director of WA Asians For Equality, said, "We reject the notion that those who were wronged and denied citizenship are not 'real Americans'. It is our responsibility to rectify historical injustices and acknowledge that our ancestors, who built railroads, dug canals, and worked in plantations, are Americans, identifiable as 'Americans of Chinese Descent', and their stories are an integral part



Gov. Inslee is reading the Americans of Chinese Descent History Flashcard, which was independently put together by middle and high school students.

of American history."

In the end, the House committee unanimously passed the amended SB 5000, which adopted names from both sides. The amended bill designates January as "Chinese American/ Americans of Chinese Descent History Month." Even though the amendment was requested by Rep. Santos and the intent section of the amendment came directly from her own HB 1759, she voted "Nay" on the amended SB 5000 during the House floor vote. Rep. Ryu was the only other legislator who voted against the bill.

The House passed SB 5000 as amended on April 6, and the Senate concurred on April 13. The Governor signed the bill on May 9. In a press release, Senator Wagoner said, "The history of this legislation, like the history of the Chinese people in America, is complicated with several dark and disappointing moments." Wagoner added, "But just like that history, the dark moments only make the achievements of the community shine that much brighter."

The local Americans of Chinese descent community is already looking forward to celebrating the first Americans of Chinese Descent History Month in January 2024. "Planning work has begun. We are excited. Starting next January, we hope the commemorative month will bring people's attention to the history of Americans of Chinese descent and that our schools and society will start to talk about this topic. We are always part of American society," Yang said. "We also hope other states can follow suit and establish Americans of Chinese Descent History Month."

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