



PETER SAKAI
BEXAR COUNTY JUDGE

April 14, 2025

Homeland Security, Public Safety & Veterans' Affairs Committee

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Rep. Katrina Pierson: katrina.pierson@house.texas.gov

RE: OPPOSITION TO HOUSE BILL 17

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee Members on Homeland Security, Public Safety & Veterans' Affairs:

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States government, by and through President Franklin D. Roosevelt, issued Executive Order 9066, which ordered the internment of all Japanese and Japanese American citizens on the West Coast to designated internment camps. With no due process and under, then emergency powers of the Federal government, my grandparents and all their young children were immediately displaced to a God-forsaken location in Poston, Arizona. That is where my father as a teenager grew up on a military base that housed the Army cavalry which meant my grandparents lived in horse stables converted to private quarters. In 1988, President Ronald Reagan issued a formal apology and the repudiation of Executive Order 9066. In 2018, The United States Supreme Court later reversed the precedent that justified this unconstitutional and unconscionable act of our government that allowed the internment of American citizens based on their nationality and unfounded fear of a group of people during war time.

Let us not forget that my grandparents, as immigrants from Japan, came to the United States to seek a safe and secure place to live and the land of opportunity for their families over 100 years ago. I am truly blessed to have the values from my grandparents imparted upon my parents and then, imparted on me, which was to always work hard, be honest and live with integrity, and be humble. I am most fortunate that those values have allowed me to be the current County Judge of Bexar County and former District Court Judge in charge of the nationally renowned Children's Court hearing child abuse and neglect cases. I am eternally grateful for the courage and fortitude of my immigrant grandparents to allow this Japanese American to share in the grand and vast American experience of success and good fortune.

At the same time, let us not forget that my immigrant grandparents were subjected to being told to "Go back home to where you came from", to be racially insulted and ostracized because of their last name and the shape of their eyes, and to being excluded by unconstitutional and discriminatory laws that prevented them from owning land in Texas. Again, history repeats itself in its ugly and reprehensible way of dealing with people which may cause irreparable harm and unconstitutional consequences.

That is why I stand in opposition to House Bill 17 (HB17) that is being considered by the current Legislative session. HB17 has been justified as national security as to certain countries like China, Iran, North Korea, and Russia that may not be considered an ally of the United States by not allowing people from those countries from purchasing property here in Texas. We can argue that some of the leaders of these named countries are friends and allies of our current President. The United States Constitution requires that there is strict scrutiny of these types of laws as it applies to those affected. Once again, this is an attempt to exclude people from those countries without due process and legal basis. This law discriminates because it is overbroad and overbreadth in its application to people from these countries. It unconstitutionally prevents people or businesses from those countries from investing and being part of the American experience. It does not separate those who may do harm and destruction to the United States and from those who are lawful residents and have a lawful purpose to do business in Texas. Certainly, by no means, I am arguing that our national defense and security be compromised, but this particular issue is a matter of national right of the United States government where there are current laws that restrict certain countries to do business with the United States. I am very concerned by the impact of HB17 on economic development opportunities from foreign countries that have made significant and huge investments in our local economy. That is why this law should always be part and parcel of any legislation or governance of the United States of America. Foreign policy and national security are not the roles of state officials who have neither the security clearance nor the legal authority to act as such. Again, it is my personal opinion that HB17 is unconstitutional and will cause irreparable harm to people who may look like me and have a name that sounds like mine.

As a former jurist for over 26 years and a lawyer for 45 years, I have always taken an oath of office that requires me to protect and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States and of this State. I have always to the best of my ability followed the rule of law. Now more than ever, we must reaffirm and defend the rule of law. I cannot be silent and complicit in allowing this law to go forward without my opposition. I give full faith and hope that our legislators will do the same by NOT allowing HB17 to become law. I stand with my immigrant grandparents and my parents who were subject to unconstitutional laws like this one. I became an attorney, judge and now, County Judge to fulfill the American dreams and aspirations of my ancestors. I am forever grateful to them that I have become part of the American dream. Please join me in opposition of HB17.

Respectfully,



Peter Sakai

Bexar County Judge

CC: Speaker of House Dustin Burrows