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CALDA Files Federal Lawsuit to Block Texas' SB 17, A Discriminatory Land Ban Targeting Chinese Americans

Legal challenge seeks to stop unconstitutional law that echoes exclusionary policies from the 1890s

HOUSTON, TX, July 3, 2025 — The Chinese American Legal Defense Alliance (CALDA), a non-profit organization dedicated to the fight against racial discrimination, filed a federal lawsuit today in Houston to challenge Texas' new alien land law, also known as SB 17.

Governor Greg Abbott signed SB 17 into law on June 20, 2025, with an effect date of September 1, 2025. In the name of national security, the law severely restricts individuals and companies from China, Iran, North Korea, and Russia from purchasing or leasing real estate in Texas.

Under SB 17, Chinese citizens without green cards — including people with valid work, student, visiting scholar, or business visitor visas or waiting for asylum — will be banned from purchasing any real estate in Texas except for a single homestead property. Equally troubling, the law bans all leases except the ones with a term shorter than one year. Violations carry severe penalties, including forced property sales, substantial fines, and felony charges.

SB 17 follows Texas's history of anti-Chinese land bans dating back to the 1890s - laws that were ultimately struck down or repealed after World War II. More than a century later, Texas lawmakers have revived exclusionary policies reminiscent of the notorious Chinese Exclusion Acts.

Texas is not alone. Florida passed its alien land law in 2023, similarly restricting Chinese Americans' rights to buy or own real estate in Florida (CALDA has also filed a legal challenge which is now pending before the court of appeals). States including Indiana, Nebraska, Virginia, Utah, Ohio, Michigan, and North Carolina have passed or are considering copycat bills. As of 2025, hundreds of such legislative proposals have surfaced nationwide.

CALDA's lawsuit represents three Chinese Americans — two with student visas and one with work visa — in a proposed class action seeking to strike down SB 17. The plaintiffs face severe barriers to renting or purchasing properties under the new law. The complaint alleges multiple constitutional violations, including Equal Protection, Due Process, and Federal Preemption. It asks the court to declare SB 17 unconstitutional and void.

“We are standing up not only for these three plaintiffs, but for every Chinese American who deserves equal protection and basic dignity in the United States,” said Justin Sadowsky, Legal Director for CALDA and the lead counsel on the case. “This discriminatory law violates fundamental constitutional principles and perpetuates harmful stereotypes that have no place in modern America.”

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