



**For Immediate Release**  
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## **25 Harvard Student and Alumni Organizations File Amicus Brief in Support of College Admissions Policies That Foster Diversity**

Today, 25 Harvard student and alumni organizations, represented by the Legal Defense Fund (LDF), filed an amicus brief in the Supreme Court of the United States in *Students for Fair Admissions (SFFA) v. Harvard* asking the Court to uphold over 40 years of precedent holding that it is legally permissible to consider race as one of many factors in admissions to higher education.

In their brief, the 25 organizations argue that while all students should have an equal opportunity to compete for admission to our nation's most selective universities, due to longstanding inequalities in our PK-12 schools, students of color generally have far less of an opportunity to amass the traditional credentials valued by universities, such as high grade point averages and standardized test scores, but are nonetheless qualified to compete for admission and contribute to the diversity of the student body — a goal that the Supreme Court has sanctioned for over four decades.

Read the full amicus brief [here](#).

“Overruling over 40 years of Supreme Court precedent by outlawing the limited consideration of race in college admissions, as SFFA has asked the Court to do, would reproduce in our country’s universities and colleges the racial inequities that persist in its K-12 school system and deprive this nation of the unique benefit of our diverse population and of the leadership potential of students who did not have the advantage of equal educational opportunities,” said **LDF President and Director-Counsel Janai S. Nelson**. “Such a reversal of precedent would not only further cement racial inequality and segregation in our country, it would also call into question the legitimacy of selective colleges and universities, the institutions populated by their graduates, as well as the legitimacy of the Supreme Court.”

“Colleges and universities cannot reap the education benefits of diversity unless they have the freedom to consider race, as one of many factors in a holistic admissions process, to identify talented and qualified students of color, whose prospects are artificially depressed by the unequal PK-12 educational landscape,” said **LDF Senior Counsel Michaele Turnage Young**. “Learning amongst students who have different backgrounds and experiences fosters stronger critical thinking skills, broadened perspectives, greater understanding, and more overall knowledge, which are essential in our increasingly multiracial democracy that demands even greater proficiency in working with diverse groups.”

In November 2020, the First Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed in a 104-page decision a trial court’s judgment that Harvard’s holistic, race-conscious admissions program is legal and permissible.

*Client quotes are below. The 25 student and alumni organizations include:*

- Association of Black Harvard Women
- Coalition for a Diverse Harvard
- First Generation Harvard Alumni
- Fuerza Latina of Harvard
- Harvard Asian American Alumni Alliance
- Harvard Asian American Brotherhood
- Harvard Black Alumni Society
- Harvard Islamic Society
- Harvard Japan Society
- Harvard Korean Association
- Harvard Latino Alumni Alliance
- Harvard Minority Association of Pre-Medical Students
- Harvard Phillips Brooks House Association
- Harvard Progressive Jewish Alumni
- Harvard South Asian Association
- Harvard University Muslim Alumni
- Harvard Vietnamese Association
- Harvard-Radcliffe Asian American Association
- Harvard-Radcliffe Asian American Women's Association
- Harvard-Radcliffe Black Students Association
- Harvard-Radcliffe Chinese Students Association
- Kuumba Singers of Harvard College
- Native American Alumni of Harvard University
- Natives at Harvard College
- Task Force for Asian American Progressive Advocacy and Studies at Harvard College

### ***Client Quotes***

**Christine Lee and Annabel Cho, Co-Presidents, Harvard Korean Association:** “As Asian-American students and representatives of the Harvard Korean Association, we voice our firm support for holistic, race-conscious college admission programs. The consideration of race in the college admissions process not only bears in mind the important historical contexts of unequal access and opportunities for students of color, but the necessity of upholding diversity as a key component in developing a rich educational environment.”

**Shruthi Kumar and Ali Makani, Co-Presidents, Harvard South Asian Association:** “Harvard South Asian Association recognizes that diversity in higher education cultivates an environment that is conducive to the production of thoughtful and conscious citizens and leaders. We unequivocally condemn efforts by SFFA to undo or limit affirmative action on campus, and hope that the Supreme Court upholds precedent and continues to deem race-conscious admissions to be legal. We recognize that the current admissions process is not perfect; however, race-conscious admissions has the unique advantage of creating a diverse campus experience that recognizes intellect beyond the traditional metrics of grade point averages and standardized test scores. In this regard, SFFA's case against Harvard risks not only the wellbeing and representation of students of color, but, if successful, would rob many college campuses of diverse and valuable contributions to scholarship, research, and innovation.”

**Julia Casas, President, and Jose Avalos-Berrospe, Vice President, Fuerza Latina of Harvard:** “Affirmative action was established with the intent of improving opportunities for historically marginalized groups while racist, discriminatory legislation was being dismantled. To eliminate the holistic admissions practice of affirmative action would send the message that race-conscious laws are no longer necessary in this country. It would allow college campuses to be colorblind and ignorant towards issues of misrepresentation. Harvard Fuerza Latina believes in the value of diversity and recognizes the intersectional nature of race, socioeconomic status, and educational opportunity. To ignore the unique stories and personal struggles of underrepresented applicants is to deny students, like the members of our beautiful organization, an equitable chance at obtaining opportunities.”

**Lilia Gonzales, Activism Chair, Asian American Brotherhood:** “As a current Harvard student, I can safely say that one of the most important and impactful parts of my education so far has been the diverse student community—only made possible through race-conscious admissions—that helped me come into contact with so many different kinds of people and viewpoints. And, as someone who is mixed race, I also understand the impact that my dual background has had in shaping me as a person. If the Court sides with SFFA, it will not only help destroy this valuable college experience for all future students, but it will also be sending the message that the cultures and communities in which people’s identities are deeply rooted simply don’t matter.”

**David Lewis ‘24, Political Action Chair of the Harvard Black Students**

**Association:** “The precedent regarding race conscious admissions must be upheld to maintain a fair admissions process because the stories, essays, and applications of students of color cannot present an accurate, holistic picture of who we are as people, students, and citizens without taking into account the innumerable ways in which race has impacted every aspect of our lives. Our accomplishments cannot be understood without understanding the lifetime of racial inequality we persevered through.

“The opportunities we had to forge for ourselves cannot reveal our true grit and determination without first acknowledging the ones we were forced to miss out on as they were unfairly restricted to our white peers. The idea that Black or other students of color are—in any way, shape, or form—less qualified than white applicants, as those who argue that SAT and GPA scores are enough to demonstrate merit suggest, is another manifestation of false, racial stereotypes that have closed doors to opportunities for too long.

“We deserve an equal chance and equal access to high quality, higher education, and the research overwhelmingly shows that, when given the opportunity, we contribute even more to our schools, the communities we came from, and the world we enter into once we leave than our white peers. The drop in Black enrollment that would occur should SFFA win would be of great detriment not just to the Black community in and outside Harvard, but also to all students at the college and the future of this country as a whole.”

**Athena Lao, AB '12, President, Harvard Asian American Alumni Alliance:** “We believe Asian American students, like all students, are enormously enriched when they are part of a diverse student community. Many of us benefited from race-conscious admissions policies as we applied to college, and we believe they continue to be necessary for future students to have equitable opportunities, to have the fullest possible educational experience and to be prepared to thrive and lead in our challenging world. We believe such policies are also necessary in supporting Asian Americans and combating inequities in the workplace and other areas of our lives.”

**Rachel B. Tiven, Harvard Progressive Jewish Alumni:** “For decades, Harvard used a quota to limit the number of Jewish men admitted. As Jewish alumni, we are sensitive to quotas designed to exclude any particular group of students. Race conscious admissions is not a quota system. As Jews of all races and backgrounds, our experiences at Harvard were enriched by the diversity of the student body. We affirm our pride in the presence of Jews at Harvard. The shameful history of anti-Jewish quotas in the Ivy League should not be misused to limit diversity in higher education today.”

**Jeannie Park, AB '83, Co-Founder/Board Member, Coalition for a Diverse Harvard:** “In a world of persistent racial inequalities, affirmative action is critical to building diverse campuses that offer life-changing educations to students of all backgrounds. Colleges, of all places, should be engines of equality and should not reinforce existing opportunity gaps. Ending affirmative action would set the goal of equity in education back decades, undermining the legacy of *Brown v. Board of Education* and the very legitimacy of the Supreme Court. We see this case as part of a larger movement to reverse progress toward a more equitable society, and we stand firmly against this effort to take us backwards.”

**Eura Choi '24, Co-President, Chelsea Wang '25, Co-Educational/Political Chair, and Kylan Tatum '25, Co-Educational/Political Chair, Harvard-Radcliffe Asian American Association:** “As representatives of the Harvard-Radcliffe Asian American Association, one of the largest and most diverse cultural organizations at Harvard, we know how crucial diversity is in creating an environment of growth, community, and celebration.

“Our organization arose from rejection and exclusion. When two Asian American students were turned away from a Minority Freshman Banquet sponsored by the university in 1976, Asian American students, aided by Black, Hispanic, and other minority student groups, signed petitions, circulated fliers, and organized sit-ins to fight for official minority recognition from Harvard. This spirit of cross-racial solidarity ultimately resulted in the founding of the Harvard-Radcliffe Asian American Association and has informed our organizational mission ever since.

“Now more than ever, it is important that we stand by other students of color as affirmative action is challenged. Education has historically been and continues to be a privilege. White students are more likely to have access to accelerated courses, extracurricular activities, and preparation for standardized testing. As the amicus brief emphasizes, affirmative action strives to account for these racial discrepancies. Race-conscious admissions have and must continue to break generational cycles of poverty and discrimination.

“SFFA has tried to portray Asian Americans as a monolithic group disadvantaged by affirmative action, but the reality is that Asian Americans are a geographically, socioeconomically, and racially diverse group. Many Asian ethnicities and experiences, such as those from low-income and/or multiracial backgrounds, are severely underrepresented at elite institutions. Asian Americans are not the victims of affirmative action but are instead beneficiaries of it in the past, present, and future.”

**Natives at Harvard College:** “In 1650, the nascent Harvard Corporation adopted a charter that committed the new university to ‘the education of English and Indian youth,’ among other foundational goals. At that time, some Indigenous students did indeed attend the Indian College that Harvard had recently built on their homelands, although the challenges they faced – including plague, warfare, colonialism, and the pressures of assimilationist and missionary education practices – were extreme. One such student who overcame those early adversities was

Caleb Cheeshteamuck, a Wampanoag man who became Harvard's first Native American graduate in 1655. The second Wampanoag student to earn a Harvard College degree – Tiffany Smalley – graduated in 2011. Why are Native students still so underrepresented, even at schools like Harvard, which is still governed by the charter promising to afford educational opportunities to Indigenous people?

“At Harvard and beyond, Native and Indigenous students face unique pressures that make *SFFA v. Harvard* very personal and important to our futures. Despite harmful stereotypes and accusations that Native students don't work hard and can get a free ride to any college we want just for being Native, the reality is that less than half of a percent of students at Harvard – between the college and all the graduate schools combined – are American Indian, Alaska Native, or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. Affirmative action does not give Native people an unfair advantage, but striking down years of legal precedent to get rid of it would exacerbate the disadvantages that Native students already disproportionately face.

“For those of us who do attend Harvard, we attend knowing that our school employs only four full-time Native American faculty members, that we often have to deal with racism from peers and staff and faculty alike, and that our school does not even offer degrees in Indigenous studies or similar fields. How can we expect any of these adversities to change for the better at a school where much of the student body will still likely graduate without ever even meeting an Indigenous peer?

“As Indigenous students at Harvard College, we know that our identities, knowledge, and contributions are inherently valuable to the spaces we inhabit, from our families and home communities to internationally renowned institutions like Harvard, the University of North Carolina, and more. Our unique life experiences and perspectives enrich every academic community in which we are present. We deserve to be here.

“However, because of factors such as intergenerational poverty, the ongoing trauma of colonial education (including, but not limited to, the legacy of the Residential School/Indian Boarding School systems in the U.S. and Canada), limited access to educational enrichment and extracurricular activities (especially on reservations), and lack of representation, opportunity, and culturally relevant teaching and role modeling both in K-12 and higher academia, Native students do not have the same advantages as white students when applying to college. Nevertheless, Native students at Harvard consistently achieve at the highest level and go on to become distinguished scholars, professionals, and leaders in our fields. Taking students' full identity into account helps ensure that we will be able to show up as our most authentic, successful selves at the universities that we have worked for years to have a chance to attend.

“*SFFA v. Harvard* matters to Natives at Harvard College for many reasons, but first and foremost we all agree that affirmative action is necessary, and benefits Harvard as a whole by creating a diverse, vibrant community for everybody. Natives of Harvard College hopes that the court will uphold its precedent, and, in so doing, uphold the right of Indigenous students to gain equitable opportunities to achieve our educational goals.”

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*LDF. Please note that LDF has been completely separate from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) since 1957—although LDF was originally founded by the NAACP and shares its commitment to equal rights.*