

Legislation Text

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Celebrating Philadelphia's breakthrough, Grammy-nominated, experimental pop band Japanese Breakfast for its pioneering sound and recent critical acclaim, and recognizing the band's frontwoman, Michelle Zauner, a powerful voice for AAPI women and Korean Americans, whose best-selling memoir, *Crying in H Mart*-a tribute to her late mother and the Korean food and culture that bound their love-has moved countless readers across the globe.

WHEREAS, Michelle Zauner, who was born in Seoul and immigrated to Eugene, Oregon when she was nine months old, began playing the piano at five years old, and, after begging her mother for a guitar, finally secured one by age sixteen. Zauner has explained: "I learned my first three chords and I was really off to the races. I just loved songwriting and the guitar really became this vehicle for songwriting. It was just my instrument." The indie rock band the Yeah Yeah Yeahs especially inspired Zauner, who has explained that the band's "front woman, Karen O, was the first icon of the music world I worshiped who looked like me. She was half Korean and half white with an unrivaled showmanship that obliterated the docile Asian stereotype"; and

WHEREAS, Zauner found a home in the Philadelphia region when she was an undergraduate at Bryn Mawr College, where she graduated with an independent major in creative production and focused her studies on creative writing; and

WHEREAS, Zauner spent her 20s working on both her writing and her music while living in Philadelphia. She worked in concessions and coat check at the City's renowned music venue Union Transfer while recording and performing as the front woman of the band Little Big League. Zauner worked tirelessly to perfect her craft and gain acclaim, including developing a new solo act known as Japanese Breakfast which began posting original songs online in 2013; and

WHEREAS, In May 2014, Zauner's mother was diagnosed with late stage pancreatic cancer. Zauner returned to her Oregon hometown and spent more than four months as her mother's loving caretaker until her passing. In her memoir, Zauner wrote about the overwhelming grief and pain of her mother and aunt both passing away within five years of one another. As a daughter of an immigrant mother, she wrote poignantly about the fear of losing memory and identity: "I'm searching for memories. I'm collecting the evidence that the Korean half of my identity didn't die when they did"; and

WHEREAS, Zauner turned to writing and traditional Korean cooking to heal in the aftermath of both her mother and aunt's deaths. In July 2016, *Glamour* magazine selected Zauner as the winner of its national essay contest, with the essay "Real Life: Love, Loss, and Kimchi." The essay highlighted Zauner's devotion to the Korean chef and YouTuber, Maangchi, and Zauner's efforts to find home and reconnect with her mother through learning how to cook traditional Korean comfort food; and

WHEREAS, Zauner continued workshopping material and writing new music. In 2016, Japanese Breakfast released its debut album, *Psychopomp*, whose songs Zauner has described as "chasing [a] sort of emotional bliss." In her video for "Everybody Wants to Love You," Zauner wears her mother's wedding hanbok on top of a tractor trailer, which prompted comedian Bowen Yang to gush "Who the (\$!*!) is this girl in a hanbok

shredding on an 18-wheeler???” Zauner followed up *Psychopomp* with a 2017 album, *Soft Sounds From Another Planet*. Both albums stem from the grief that Zauner faced as a result of her mother’s untimely passing; and

WHEREAS, In August 2018, *The New Yorker* published Zauner’s essay “Crying in H Mart,” an exploration of Zauner’s grief and her search for memory, identity, and revival through Korean food, culture, and community. “Food was how my mother expressed her love,” Zauner writes. Zauner explores the offerings of the Korean American supermarket chain H Mart as a portal for her to reconnect with her late mother and the Korean food traditions that grounded their loving and complex relationship; and

WHEREAS, Zauner’s *New Yorker* essay forms the first chapter of her April 2021 memoir, *Crying in H Mart*, which explores the visceral role that Korean food and culture plays in Zauner’s journey to remember and honor her late mother. “If I could not be with my mother, I would be her,” Zauner writes. Zauner recounts her desire to reclaim her mother in the H Mart of Elkins Park, a Philadelphia suburb. The memoir debuted at number two on *The New York Times* nonfiction best-seller list; and

WHEREAS, In June 2021, Japanese Breakfast released its third studio album, *Jubilee*, which Zauner described as an “album about joy”: “My artistic narrative has been so rooted in grief and loss that to write an album about joy feels like a real departure.” Critics have described *Jubilee* as “a stylish and eclectic record that feels of the moment and also steeped in classic indie sensibilities” and an album that opens listeners up “to discovery, to feeling, and the possibility of a brighter tomorrow”; and

WHEREAS, Japanese Breakfast was nominated for two 2022 Grammy Awards—one for best new artist, and the other for best alternative music album. The band was also nominated for the 2022 GLAAD Media Award for outstanding breakthrough music artist, and was recently announced as the musical guest for Saturday Night Live’s Season 47 finale; and

WHEREAS, While Japanese Breakfast and *Crying in H Mart* have become international sensations, the band remains close to its Philadelphia roots. In August 2021, Japanese Breakfast sold out all five shows at Union Transfer. When the music venue announced that it had renamed its coat check “The Michelle Zauner Coat Check,” Zauner posed with the coat check’s tip bucket and declared: “I love Philly the most.” On July 23, 2022, Japanese Breakfast will headline Connor Barwin’s Make the World Better Benefit at the Dell Music Center, which will devote funds to revitalize community gathering spaces across Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, In writing about her search for her mother, Zauner has truly found herself. In addition to her work in writing and music, she has become a widely admired fashion influencer and video producer. Zauner recently announced she is working on a screenplay and soundtrack for a film adaptation of *Crying in H Mart*; and

WHEREAS, Zauner has uplifted the AAPI community. Zauner has stated: “I know that I have a platform, and I know that I have an especially large Asian American demographic of fans, and I want to be a courageous person and role model that has the right thing to say about it.” As such, she has used social media to promote the #StopAsianHate movement and has donated her band’s merchandise to Philadelphia producer Will Yip’s #StopAsianHate raffle, benefiting the AAPI Community Fund, which issues grants to organizations working to rectify racial inequalities against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders; and

WHEREAS, Through her music and writing, Zauner is a unique creative voice for Asian America. Her work has deeply explored themes of belonging, motherhood, grief, renewal, and cultural reclamation and preservation. Her words—whether on the page or reverberating through a concert venue—remind us that through

grief and joy, conscious acts of cultural reclamation, oral histories and storytelling, and the power of artistic expression pay homage to the relationships we have with those closest to us, and with those who have passed. As Zauner wrote: “We're all searching for a piece of home, or a piece of ourselves. We look for a taste of it in the food we order and the ingredients we buy. Then we separate. We bring the haul back to our dorm rooms or our suburban kitchens, and we re-create the dish that couldn't be made without our journey”; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Celebrates Philadelphia’s breakthrough, Grammy-nominated, experimental pop band Japanese Breakfast for its pioneering sound and recent critical acclaim, and recognizes the band’s frontwoman, Michelle Zauner, a powerful voice for AAPI women and Korean Americans, whose best-selling memoir, *Crying in H Mart*-a tribute to her late mother and the Korean food and culture that bound their love-has moved countless readers across the globe.