

119TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 5303

To encourage and support the Department of State’s diplomatic advocacy efforts on behalf of Gao Zhisheng and other political prisoners in the People’s Republic of China, including in Hong Kong, and globally.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SEPTEMBER 11, 2025

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey (for himself, Mr. SUOZZI, and Mr. MOOLENAAR) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs, and in addition to the Committees on the Judiciary, Financial Services, and Ways and Means, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

A BILL

To encourage and support the Department of State’s diplomatic advocacy efforts on behalf of Gao Zhisheng and other political prisoners in the People’s Republic of China, including in Hong Kong, and globally.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Framework for Re-
5 sponding to Enforced Exile and Detentions through Over-

1 sight and Mobilizing Diplomatic Support Act” or “FREE-
2 DOM for Gao Zhisheng and All Political Prisoners Act”.

3 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

4 Congress finds the following:

5 (1) Prominent human rights lawyer Gao
6 Zhisheng disappeared in August 2017, reportedly
7 into state custody, and has been subject to various
8 forms of detention since 2006, including severe tor-
9 ture, for his work defending religious minorities and
10 farmers facing land expropriations and for writing
11 open letters condemning the persecution of Falun
12 Gong practitioners and Christians.

13 (2) In 2023, lawyer Ding Jiayi and legal schol-
14 ar Xu Zhiyong were sentenced to 12 and 14 years
15 in prison, respectively, for “subversion of state
16 power” in connection with their advocacy for con-
17 stitutional reform. The United Nations Working
18 Group on Arbitrary Detention determined their de-
19 tentions to be arbitrary.

20 (3) Hong Kong authorities detained Jimmy Lai
21 Chee-ying in August 2020 on the charges of “con-
22 spiracy to fraud” and “collusion with a foreign coun-
23 try”, an offense under the Law of the People’s Re-
24 public of China on Safeguarding National Security
25 in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

1 (NSL). Lai is the founder of Apple Daily, a pro-
2 democracy newspaper and his detention is believed
3 to be part of a government effort to suppress free
4 press and intimidate pro-democracy advocates.

5 (4) Hong Kong barrister Tonyee Chow Hang-
6 tung was sentenced in 2023 to 4.5 months in jail for
7 defying the demands of the national security police
8 for information on the disbanded civil society group
9 commonly known as Hong Kong Alliance, which or-
10 ganized annual vigils to commemorate the 1989
11 Tiananmen Massacre. The recent sentence length-
12 ened a 22-month prison term Chow received for or-
13 ganizing vigils in 2020 and 2021.

14 (5) Falun Gong practitioner Xu Na was de-
15 tained in 2020 along with 12 others and later given
16 an 8-year sentence for allegedly sharing photos of
17 Beijing street scenes during the COVID-19 pan-
18 demic with an overseas publication and for posses-
19 sion of Falun Gong materials at their homes. Xu
20 previously served two prison sentences in connection
21 with her practice of Falun Gong and in 2008 her
22 husband Yu Zhou died in police custody.

23 (6) Zhou Deyong was detained in 2021 in
24 Shandong Province after police raided his home and
25 confiscated Falun Gong materials that reportedly be-

1 longed to his wife, who was previously detained for
2 her religious activities. Authorities reportedly pre-
3 vented Zhou from meeting with his lawyer and failed
4 to notify Zhou’s family members of his detention
5 promptly, in violation of China’s Criminal Procedure
6 Law. In 2023, Zhou was sentenced to eight years in
7 prison for “organizing and using a cult to under-
8 mine implementation of the law”.

9 (7) Niu Tengyu was detained in 2019 as part
10 of a crackdown on users of the internet site
11 EsuWiki, following the alleged publication of the
12 personal information of relatives of Communist
13 Party General Secretary Xi Jinping. Niu was held in
14 “residential surveillance at a designated location”,
15 during which time he was reportedly severely tor-
16 tured. In late 2020, Niu received a 14-year prison
17 sentence.

18 (8) Yang Chih-yuan was detained in 2022 and
19 accused of promoting Taiwan independence and en-
20 gaging in “separatist” activities. In 2024, authori-
21 ties sentenced Yang to nine years in prison. Yang’s
22 alleged “separatist” activities took place between
23 2008 and 2020 while he was in Taiwan. He is the
24 first Taiwanese national to be charged with “sepa-

1 ratism” under Article 103 of the PRC Criminal
2 Law.

3 (9) Ruan Xiaohuan was detained in 2021 in
4 connection with his social media account and his
5 blog, where he provided anonymous guidance for cir-
6 cumventing government internet censorship and
7 wrote political analysis critical of Chinese authori-
8 ties, including coverage of the 1989 Tiananmen pro-
9 tests. He also separately documented high-ranking
10 officials’ hidden wealth. He was sentenced in 2023
11 to seven years in prison for “inciting subversion of
12 state power”.

13 (10) Tibetan community leader Anya Sengdra
14 was initially detained in 2018 in connection with his
15 claims that local officials had misappropriated pov-
16 erty alleviation funds meant for Tibetan nomads. In
17 2019 he was sentenced to 7 years in prison, accused
18 by officials of “disturbing public order” for leading
19 groups to discuss anti-corruption and environmental
20 advocacy. Authorities delayed his expected Sep-
21 tember 2025 release from prison.

22 (11) Artist Gao Zhen remains detained for “in-
23 sulting or slandering heroes and martyrs,” report-
24 edly in connection with his artwork, including art
25 with the theme of reassessing Mao Zedong’s rule.

1 Gao is a lawful permanent resident of the United
2 States, and his seven-year-old son is an American
3 citizen, who is prevented, via an “exit ban” from
4 leaving China along with his mother.

5 (12) Renagul Gheni, a Uyghur elementary
6 school teacher, was detained in 2018 and later given
7 a 17-year sentence reportedly for offering prayers at
8 her father’s funeral and her possession of a Quran.

9 (13) Uyghur ethnographer Rahile Dawut was
10 reportedly sentenced to life in prison on a charge re-
11 lated to “endangering state security”. Friends and
12 other observers suggested authorities may have de-
13 tained her due to her efforts to preserve Uyghur cul-
14 ture and heritage, or her foreign connections. She
15 formerly taught at Xinjiang University and is well
16 regarded for her scholarly research on Uyghur cul-
17 tural traditions.

18 (14) Meryem Emet was detained in 2017 and
19 later sentenced to 20 years in prison on an unknown
20 charge reportedly related to her marriage to a Turk-
21 ish national, and her having met and spoken with
22 Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan dur-
23 ing his 2012 visit to the Xinjiang Uyghur Autono-
24 mous Region.

1 (15) Lobsang Trinle, a monk at Kirti Mon-
2 astery in Sichuan Province, was detained by police
3 in 2021 and sentenced to 5 years in prison report-
4 edly for sharing the 14th Dalai Lama’s teachings
5 and writings about the Dalai Lama with other Ti-
6 betans.

7 (16) A Tibetan writer known by the pen name
8 Sabuche, Thubten Lodroe was detained and later
9 given a 4-year and 5-month sentence in 2021 report-
10 edly for his writings on Tibetan society, politics, and
11 language rights. He was reportedly subjected to
12 abuse in prison, including forced labor, and in 2024
13 was hospitalized in serious condition.

14 (17) Wang Yi, pastor of the unregistered
15 Protestant “Early Rain Covenant Church” was de-
16 tained in 2018 after drafting an open letter de-
17 nouncing restrictions on religious freedom that was
18 signed by over 400 other Chinese church leaders and
19 he was later given a 9-year sentence for “subversion
20 of state power”. The “Early Rain” church was fore-
21 ibly closed as part of a broader crackdown on unreg-
22 istered churches and places of worship in China.

23 (18) Hao Zhiwei, a pastor at an unregistered
24 Protestant church was arrested and in 2022 given
25 an 8-year sentence because she refused to join the

1 government-approved Protestant Three-Self Patri-
2 otic Movement or Chinese Christian Council.

3 (19) Peng Lifa was detained shortly after he
4 hung banners from Sitong Bridge in Beijing calling
5 for the removal of Xi Jinping, calling for elections,
6 and criticizing China’s harsh zero-COVID policy
7 measures. Peng’s whereabouts and condition, or any
8 potential charges against him, remain unknown.

9 (20) Li Kangmeng was detained in connection
10 with her participation in the “white paper” protests
11 against harsh zero-COVID policy measures. Multiple
12 reports assert that Li Kangmeng was the first to
13 raise a sheet of white paper as a form of protest.
14 The legal basis for Li’s detention and the location
15 of her detention site are unknown.

16 (21) Dong Yuyu was detained in 2022 while at
17 lunch with a Japanese diplomat and placed in resi-
18 dential surveillance at a designated location and
19 later charged with “espionage”. Dong Yuyu is a
20 well-known journalist, who had worked for the New
21 York Times and Chinese publications, and held aca-
22 demic fellowship at various universities in Japan and
23 at Harvard University. His family has not been al-
24 lowed to meet with him since his detention.

1 (22) The number of political prisoners in the
2 People's Republic of China remains unknown, given
3 active digital censorship and free speech restrictions.

4 (23) The Political Prisoner Database of the
5 Congressional-Executive Commission on China is a
6 valuable source of information on political prisoners
7 in the People's Republic of China and currently con-
8 tains 2,506 active cases of detention, referring to po-
9 litical and religious prisoners currently known or be-
10 lieved to be detained or imprisoned, or under coer-
11 cive controls.

12 (24) A bipartisan group of Congressional law-
13 makers' nominated a group of political prisoners in
14 the People's Republic of China, including Hong
15 Kong for the 2023 Nobel Peace Prize, including
16 Hong Kong's Jimmy Lai Chee-ying, Joshua Wong
17 Chi-fung, Tonyee Chow Hang-tung, Gwyenth Ho
18 Kwai.lam, and Lee Cheuk-yan, and mainland Chi-
19 na's Zhang Zhan, Peng Lifa, and Li Kangmeng.
20 The nominations honored these ardent champions of
21 peace, freedom and human rights and focus inter-
22 national advocacy on efforts for their release.

23 (25) The Chairs of the Congressional-Executive
24 Commission on China nominated Xu Zhiyong, Ding

1 Jiaxi, Ilham Tohti, and Jimmy Lai for the 2024
2 Nobel Peace Prize.

3 (26) The People’s Republic of China detains the
4 family members of United States citizens and per-
5 manent residents in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autono-
6 mous Region, including Gulshan Abbas, Ekpar Aset,
7 and the family members of former Radio Free Asia
8 employees, and uses these detentions and other
9 forms of intimidation and harassment to silence ad-
10 vocacy on behalf of their loved ones.

11 (27) The People’s Republic of China detains
12 more Americans than any other country.

13 (28) Repressive governments around the world
14 continue to detain an unknown number of individ-
15 uals for their exercise of internationally recognized
16 human rights, including in Cuba, Belarus, Hong
17 Kong, Iran, Nicaragua, North Korea, Russia, Tur-
18 key, and Vietnam, among others. It is a global prob-
19 lem in need of a global response from the United
20 States and its allies and partners.

21 **SEC. 3. STATEMENTS OF POLICY.**

22 (a) USE AVAILABLE DIPLOMATIC TOOLS TO SEEK
23 THE RELEASE OF POLITICAL PRISONERS.—It is the pol-
24 icy of the United States to—

1 (1) use all available diplomatic tools to press for
2 the release of political prisoners, including by sub-
3 mitting prisoner lists at all appropriate bilateral
4 meetings and raising individual cases of concern
5 with foreign officials, because experience shows that
6 consistently raising political prisoner cases can lead
7 to improved treatment in detention, lighter sen-
8 tences, and, in some cases, release from custody or
9 imprisonment;

10 (2) seek the release of unjustly detained or
11 wrongfully detained Americans detained in the Peo-
12 ple’s Republic of China;

13 (3) end the use of “exit bans” by the Govern-
14 ment of the People’s Republic of China that are
15 used to pressure United States citizens to get their
16 relatives or associates to return to China to face
17 criminal charges or to settle commercial disputes—
18 such bans violate international norms, including Ar-
19 ticle 35 of the U.S.–China Consular Convention; and

20 (4) use the voice and vote and influence of the
21 United States at the United Nations and other mul-
22 tilateral organizations to—

23 (A) highlight the cases of political pris-
24 oners worldwide;

1 (B) document the human rights violations
2 that lead to the arrest and imprisonment of po-
3 litical prisoners globally; and

4 (C) support investigations by United Na-
5 tions Human Rights Experts into the case of
6 political prisoners, their treatment in detention,
7 and harassment and surveillance of their family
8 members while they are imprisoned.

9 (b) HOLD GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE’S REPUB-
10 LIC OF CHINA OFFICIALS RESPONSIBLE FOR ARBITRARY
11 DETENTION.—It is the policy of the United States to con-
12 sider individuals who are responsible for, complicit in, or
13 directly engaged in the arbitrary detention or torture of
14 Gao Zhisheng and other political prisoners—or the wrong-
15 ful detention of United States citizens—as having com-
16 mitted gross violations of human rights. Such individuals
17 may be held accountable through the application of sanc-
18 tions as described in—

19 (1) the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Ac-
20 countability Act (22 U.S.C. 10101 et seq.);

21 (2) the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democ-
22 racy Act of 2019 (Public Law 116–76);

23 (3) the Hong Kong Autonomy Act (Public Law
24 116–149);

1 (4) the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of
2 2020 (Public Law 116–145);

3 (5) Executive Order No. 14078 of July 19,
4 2022, “Bolstering Efforts to Bring Hostages and
5 Wrongfully Detained United States Nationals
6 Home;”; and

7 (6) other applicable sanctions authorities of the
8 United States.

9 (c) ACTIVELY CHAMPION FOR THE RELEASE OF GAO
10 ZHISHENG.—

11 (1) IN GENERAL.—It is the policy of the United
12 States—

13 (A) to seek the release of human rights
14 lawyer Gao Zhisheng; and

15 (B) to hold accountable those officials of
16 the People’s Republic of China who are respon-
17 sible for Gao Zhisheng’s torture and arbitrary
18 detention and seek to reunify him with his fam-
19 ily who are United States citizens and resi-
20 dents.

21 (2) ADDITIONAL POLICY STATEMENT.—The
22 United States is committed to—

23 (A) vigorously advocating for Gao
24 Zhisheng at the highest levels of government,
25 including through diplomacy conducted by rel-

1 evant bureaus and offices within the Depart-
2 ment of State and other agencies across the
3 United States Government;

4 (B) ensuring sustained advocacy over time
5 across bilateral and multilateral fora to secure
6 Gao's unconditional release, proof of life and
7 whereabouts, access to legal counsel, commu-
8 nication with family—including relatives in the
9 United States—and, if appropriate, humani-
10 tarian parole;

11 (C) working in concert with United States
12 allies and partners, including through mecha-
13 nisms at the United Nations, to increase inter-
14 national pressure on the People's Republic of
15 China to release Gao Zhisheng and uphold his
16 human rights;

17 (D) seeking concrete responses from offi-
18 cials of the People's Republic of China to
19 United States and allied advocacy efforts, espe-
20 cially on matters related to Gao's health, loca-
21 tion, communication, and legal status;

22 (E) employing all appropriate diplomatic,
23 legal, and sanctions tools, including available
24 human rights sanctions authorities, to hold ac-
25 countable officials of the People's Republic of

1 China complicit in the human rights violations
2 committed against Gao Zhisheng; and

3 (F) maintaining transparency with Con-
4 gress regarding past and ongoing advocacy ef-
5 forts by submitting a timely report, in unclassi-
6 fied form (with a classified annex as needed),
7 detailing such efforts, responses received, co-
8 ordination with allies, and any use of sanctions
9 authorities to promote justice in this case.

10 **SEC. 4. DIPLOMATIC STRATEGY ON POLITICAL PRISONER**
11 **ADVOCACY.**

12 (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 120 days after the
13 date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of State,
14 or the Secretary’s designee, shall brief the appropriate
15 congressional committees on a strategy to embed political
16 prisoner advocacy into the critical mission plan of all
17 United States Government agencies, diplomatic posts, and
18 regional bureaus in the Department of State.

19 (b) MATTERS TO BE INCLUDED.—The strategy shall
20 include the following matters:

21 (1) Cases of concern involving individuals arbi-
22 trarily detained for exercising internationally recog-
23 nized human rights.

24 (2) Bilateral diplomatic efforts to secure the re-
25 lease of Gao Zhisheng and other political prisoners,

1 including a record of cases raised and the relevant
2 foreign government officials engaged.

3 (3) Multilateral diplomatic efforts to advocate
4 for the release of political prisoners, including en-
5 gagement within the United Nations system and co-
6 ordination of diplomatic advocacy and sanctions
7 measures with allies and partners to maximize inter-
8 national pressure.

9 (4) Details on efforts to secure the release of
10 Jimmy Lai in Hong Kong.

11 (5) Details on Department of State efforts to
12 support human rights defenders, independent media,
13 and the families of political prisoners and the re-
14 sources needed to conduct such support.

15 (6) Use of accountability tools, including the
16 Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act
17 and other targeted measures, to hold government of-
18 ficials accountable for complicity in the arbitrary de-
19 tention of political prisoners.

20 (7) Public diplomacy efforts designed to frame
21 advocacy for political prisoners as a United States
22 national interest and to highlight human stories of
23 political prisoners that evade censorship and other
24 digital restrictions put in place by foreign govern-
25 ments to hide complicity in arbitrary detention, tor-

1 ture, and other gross violations of universally recog-
2 nized human rights.

3 (8) Progress on the preparation of a Global
4 Prisoner Registry as required by section 5 of this
5 Act.

6 (9) An assessment of resource gaps or institu-
7 tional deficiencies that adversely affect the Depart-
8 ment of State’s ability to advocate effectively for po-
9 litical prisoners in the People’s Republic of China
10 and globally.

11 (c) FORM.—The briefings required by subsection (a)
12 shall be conducted in unclassified form, but may include
13 a classified annex if necessary to protect sources and
14 methods used to acquire such information.

15 **SEC. 5. GLOBAL POLITICAL PRISONER REGISTRY.**

16 Section 873 of the Admiral James W. Nance and
17 Meg Donovan Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal
18 Years 2000 and 2001 (Appendix G to Public Law 106–
19 113; 113 Stat. 1501A–474) is amended—

20 (1) in the section heading to read as follows:

21 **“GLOBAL POLITICAL PRISONER REGISTRY.”**;

22 (2) in subsection (a)—

23 (A) by striking “in the People’s Republic
24 of China” and inserting “held by foreign gov-
25 ernments worldwide”; and

1 (B) by striking “Prisoner Information
2 Registry for the People’s Republic of China”
3 and inserting “Global Political Prisoner Reg-
4 istry”;

5 (3) in subsection (b), by striking “of prisoners
6 in the People’s Republic of China” and inserting “of
7 such prisoners”;

8 (4) in subsection (c), by striking “regarding po-
9 litical prisoners in the People’s Republic of China”
10 and inserting “regarding political prisoners and
11 those detained for exercising the rights to the free-
12 dom of religion around the world”; and

13 (5) by adding at the end the following:

14 “(d) PUBLIC ACCESS.—To the extent practicable and
15 consistent with the protection of sensitive information, the
16 Secretary shall make information from the Global Political
17 Prisoner Registry available for use in diplomatic advocacy
18 by United States Government officials and Members of
19 Congress.

20 “(e) DEFINITION.—In this section, the term ‘political
21 prisoner’ means an individual imprisoned or detained by
22 a foreign government primarily for seeking to exercise
23 internationally recognized human rights, including be-
24 cause of the individual’s political or religious beliefs,

1 peaceful expression, or opposition to that government;
2 and”.

3 **SEC. 6. POLITICAL PRISONER ISSUE BRIEFS.**

4 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Congressional-Executive
5 Commission on China shall prepare and make available
6 issue briefs to Members of Congress, upon request, to fa-
7 cilitate discussions of political prisoner cases and unjustly
8 detained Americans with officials from the Government of
9 the People’s Republic of China. Such issue briefs shall be
10 available on the website of the Congressional-Executive
11 Commission on China, as appropriate, and subject to rel-
12 evant privacy concerns.

13 (b) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is
14 authorized to be appropriated such sums as may be nec-
15 essary to carry out this section for each fiscal years 2026
16 through 2029.

17 (c) CLARIFICATION.—The issue briefs required by
18 subsection (a) shall be in addition to and not replace the
19 information required by section 108(d) of the Inter-
20 national Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (22 U.S.C.
21 6417(d)).

22 **SEC. 7. APPROPRIATE CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES DE-**
23 **FINED.**

24 In this Act, the term “appropriate congressional com-
25 mittees” means—

- 1 (1) the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the
- 2 House of Representatives; and
- 3 (2) the Committee on Foreign Relations of the
- 4 Senate.

○