

119<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS  
1<sup>ST</sup> 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.

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## 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

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## 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.

○