

Government Administration and Elections Committee

Testimony By:

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In Support of H.B. 6002

An Act Establishing An Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission

Good morning Senator Slossberg, Representative Caruso and members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee. My name is Joyce Hamilton Henry and I am the Executive Director of DemocracyWorks. DemocracyWorks is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization whose mission is to make democracy work fairly, inclusively and vibrantly for all. We work to increase civic participation particularly by underrepresented and disenfranchised individuals and communities. **DemocracyWorks is in full support of H.B. 6002, An Act Establishing An Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission.** Such a Commission will help to advance the human and civil rights of Asian Pacific Americans in Connecticut.

According to the Asian American Justice Center, there are 13.9 million Asian Americans in the United States today – more than 60 percent of whom were born overseas. In 2005, more than 200,000 Asian immigrants (representing 39 percent of all naturalizations that year) became U.S. citizens. In addition, 36 percent of the people who became lawful permanent residents in 2005 were from Asia.

The 2005 American Community Survey (ACS) indicates that Connecticut's foreign-born population is 12.5% compared to 10.9% in 2000 and 8.4% in 1990. Of the foreign born population in Connecticut, 21% are from Asia. The steady growth of this community (both foreign born and native born) necessitates that they be given every opportunity to fully participate and contribute to their community. One of the insidious barriers faced by this group is the stereotype of the "model minority."

Asian Pacific Americans are not immune to the range of issues that affect other ethnic groups and are especially challenged due to linguistic and cultural barriers. There will be many testimonies today that will speak in detail about the little to no resources available to Asian Pacific Americans in Connecticut and the many barriers to health, mental health and other services (see attached Fact Sheet).

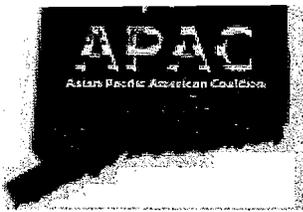
In 2005, the Urban Institute conducted a study about Connecticut's immigrants entitled *Immigrants in Connecticut: Labor Market Experiences and Health Care Access*. The

following are some of the recommendations that apply in part to Asian Pacific Americans and should be taken into consideration in the discussion of the need for a Commission:

- Continue to welcome immigrants to Connecticut to support future labor force and population growth.
- Continue to support immigration of highly educated workers for Connecticut's high skill industries.
- Support education, job training, and English language programs for recent immigrants.
- Increase the number of CHSs and other safety net providers across the state and increase their capacity.

Healthy individuals, communities, and a healthy democracy necessitate that we ensure the full participation and representation of all members of our society.

I appreciate the opportunity to add these thoughts to the discourse. If you have any questions, please contact me by email at joycehamiltonhenry@democracyworksct.org or at (860) 727-1157.



Asian Pacific American Coalition of Connecticut (APAC)

APAC Urges Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission Formation

Asian Pacific Americans (APAs) are one of the fastest-growing populations in the country. In the 2005, according to the U.S. Census, APAs represented approximately 3.2% of the total population in Connecticut, making Connecticut the 8th fastest growing APA population in the United States. From 2000 to 2005, the APA population in Connecticut grew more than 30%, from approximately 84,000 to over 108,000. APAs come from nearly 50 countries and ethnic groups, including East Asians, Pacific Islanders, Southeast Asians, South Asians and Asian-Latino Americans.¹ These groups within the APA community speak numerous languages, practice different religions and have markedly different needs and characteristics.

Despite the “model minority” stereotype, many APAs are in desperate need of services, including mental health and physical health services; job training; English language education; and access to courts and the legal system. APAs continually face bias, discrimination, and hate crimes which are often overlooked or under-reported. Almost 8,000 APAs in Connecticut live in poverty.

With this tremendous APA population growth, the Connecticut Legislature now has the opportunity to partner with the APA community in identifying and addressing the APA community’s unique needs. An Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission would serve as a resource to the Governor, the Legislature, state agencies, departments, and commissions on issues relating to the social, educational, health, economic development, and civil rights concerns and interests of the APA community to adequately serve this growing population. Bringing together APA leaders from different vocations, backgrounds, and regions of Connecticut to give unfiltered feedback from an impartial assessment of the needs of the APA community, the Commission would foster accountability and ensure effective and timely governmental responsiveness to Connecticut residents by serving as an advisory body and a statewide voice to make the issues and concerns of the APA community known to policymakers.

Key areas to be considered include the following:

Education

- Up to 53.3% of APAs lack English language proficiency due to the high proportion of immigrants (about 74% of APAs in Connecticut are foreign born).
- More APAs lack a rudimentary education (3.4% have an educational level below fourth grade), as compared with only 1.6% of the total population and 0.6% of whites.
- APA students suffer significantly higher rates of anxiety, depression, isolation, and discrimination from other students and school staff.
- APAs comprise the largest minority group in two-thirds of Connecticut school districts, yet the efforts to increase the number of APAs teachers has been lacking.
- Adult education, particularly offerings in English language instruction, is woefully inadequate, commonly at less than the 20 hours a week prescribed as educationally sound.

¹ The diverse APA community in Connecticut includes individuals who are Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Mongolian, Taiwanese, Burmese, Cambodian, Filipino, Hmong, Indonesian, Laotian, Thai, Vietnamese, Singaporean, Malaysian, Timorese, Bruneian, Bangladeshi, Bhutanese, Indian, Indo-Caribbean, Maldivian, Nepalese, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Tibetan, Hawaiian, and other people of Asian and/or Pacific Islander descent.

Economics

- Although APAs had the highest median annual household income (\$46,637), among the nation's racial groups in 1998, due to larger APA households (3.15 for APAs versus 2.47 for whites), the estimated income per household member is lower in the APA population (\$19,107 for APAs versus \$22,633 for whites).
- The number of APAs who live below the poverty level is significantly higher than the proportion of poor non-Hispanic whites (12.5% of APAs versus 8.2% of non-Hispanic whites).

Health Care:

- In 1998, 21.1% of APAs lacked health insurance coverage and could not afford health care expenses.
- The lack of culturally competent health care professionals, including hospital interpreters, is an overwhelming, ethnicity-specific obstacle to health care access resulting in low rates of health services utilization, high rates of emergency room use, and inadequacy of prenatal care.
- Gambling addiction services, smoking cessation, substance abuse services, health education and prevention are pressing, yet unmet needs.

Mental Health Services:

- The incidence of mental illness among Southeast Asians, primarily due to war trauma, has been measured to be as high as 75%.
- Language barriers, failure of public agencies to provide interpreters, and lack of cultural sensitivity cause mainstream services to be inaccessible to Southeast Asians and to other ethnic groups.

Criminal Justice and Legal Services:

- In the last six years, there has been a 350% increase in need for court interpreters.
- There is a need to increase the diversity of the judiciary, prosecutors, public defenders, court interpreters, and law enforcement officials to reflect the proportion of APAs in Connecticut.
- Victims of crime programs need culturally responsive support, particularly in cases of domestic violence and sex crimes.
- There are ongoing concerns for the rights of refugees and immigrants.
- There is a huge discrepancy in reporting hate crimes, i.e., in 2005, Connecticut reported zero instances of hate crimes to the F.B.I. under the Uniform Crime Reporting Program.

Housing:

- In 2003, applications for 1 to 4 family home loans by APAs comprised only 1.5% of government backed loans and 5.4% of conventional loans compared with 64% of government backed loans and 71.4% of conventional loans for whites.
- APAs in Connecticut comprise less than 2% of owner-occupied housing units.
- Although Connecticut's two casinos have attracted an influx of Asian workers, the lack of affordable housing has often forced up to 20 people to live in a single dwelling, some who must sleep in shifts.

Jobs:

- Contrary to the "model minority" stereotype, although APAs have the highest percentage of college graduates for any racial group, they make up less than 0.5% of corporate officers in Fortune 500 companies and less than 1.5% are Chief Executive Officers of Fortune 1000 companies.

The Asian Pacific American Coalition of Connecticut urges the Legislature to take this historic step towards recognizing the accomplishments and needs of Connecticut's rapidly growing APA population to form and fund an Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission. The Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission merits strong legislative support.