

Good afternoon Senator Slossberg, Representative Caruso, and members of the GAE Committee. My name is Mikhael Borgonos and I'm from the town of Meriden. I'm here to testify in support of House Bill 6002: AN ACT ESTABLISHING AN ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN AFFAIRS COMMISSION.

As an Asian-American and an ethnic minority, I feel underrepresented in the State of Connecticut.

I have been living in the United States for twelve years, and I recently became an American citizen in 2000. I have grown to love my America, but I have also become concerned of the lack of representation of Asian-Americans not only in the legislative assembly, but in state commissions as well.

Connecticut's African-Americans and Latino and Puerto Rican-Americans are represented in their own state commissions. Therefore, it would be commonsensical to develop a commission that would understand and support the unique needs of Connecticut's rapidly growing Asian-American population.

According to a recent study by DemocracyWorks, an Urban Institute research group, between 1990 and 2000, the number of Asian immigrants in Connecticut increased more than 75 percent. Altogether, Asian-Americans—immigrant or not—make up 3.2% of the entire state population, which is about 110,000 people. Theoretically, if this group were all bunched together, there would at least be five Asian-American legislators in Connecticut, but currently, there's only one—Representative William Tong from the 147th District.

From an economic perspective, a majority of East Asian, Pacific, and South Asians in Connecticut actually earn more than the average income (\$40,000) of native-

born state residents. Furthermore, two-thirds of Asian immigrants have college degrees. Although it is safe to say that Asian-Americans are an accomplished group, with professional employment concentrated in medicine and law, it is fair to say that we *also* have a struggling poverty and low-income population. East Asian and Pacific immigrants, for example, have a federal low-income rate of about 10% and a poverty rate of 17%. We're not all accomplished "model minorities" that many people label us as. Just like other ethnic and immigrant groups, Asian-Americans need support in English-language proficiency, immigration status, job training, and assimilation into American society. Even DemocracyWorks recommended in its findings that the HUSKY health care plan be expanded to cover non-citizens, to include all children regardless of legal status, length of U.S. residency, or sponsorship. This, in turn, would lessen the burden of low-income, but hard-working Asian-Americans in Connecticut.

The voices of Asian-Americans in the state have been silent and haven't been heard. Their needs haven't been addressed, much less answered. If Connecticut legislators begin to understand the unique needs of Asian-Americans by creating this commission, they will better serve their constituents and provide for a better-represented Connecticut.

Before I end my testimony, I would like to tell you about a childhood experience. Back in elementary school when I had been trick-or-treating in Senator Gaffey's house, I have always looked upon him and my Connecticut legislators as an inspiration. I actually still have the "re-election" pencil he gave me instead of candy. So what's the moral of this story? Encouraging Asian-American citizens to vote wouldn't hurt in winning re-

election races also. This would be one of the tasks assigned to the Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission.

Thank you for taking the time for this public hearing, and please support House Bill 6002 so that Asian-Americans may have an equal and powerful voice in Connecticut.