

Testimony of Sudha Setty Before the Government Administration and Elections
Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly

Date: March 16, 2007

**Re: H.B. No. 6002, AN ACT ESTABLISHING AN ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN
AFFAIRS COMMISSION.**

Madam Chairperson, Mister Chairman and members of the Committee.

Good morning. My name is Sudha Setty.

I am an assistant professor of law at Western New England College School of Law, in Springfield, Massachusetts. I am also a board member of the South Asian Bar Association of Connecticut.

I appreciate the opportunity to be heard today, and would like to voice my wholehearted support for House Bill No. 6002. My remarks will focus on the concerns of immigrants within the Asian Pacific American communities.

By way of background, I was raised in Storrs, Connecticut, where my parents still live. After graduating from E.O. Smith High School in Storrs, I went to Stanford University for my undergraduate degree, and to Columbia Law School for my law degree.

Until last year, I worked in private practice in New York City. While in private practice, I had the opportunity to work with the non-profit Leadership Conference on Civil Rights to challenge state voter identification requirements, which are often perceived as anti-immigrant initiatives because of the effect that they have of intimidating immigrants – a constituency which has traditionally struggled to gain a voice in the democratic process – into not voting, and into not participating in government generally.

Notably, approximately 75% of the 108,000 Asian Pacific Americans in Connecticut – meaning about 80,000 Asian Pacific Americans – are immigrants.

How does this lack of participation in government affect immigrants and Connecticut as a whole?

First, in current times, national anti-immigrant sentiment is rising, as evidenced by a rise in hate crimes toward Asian immigrants and by the movement toward voter identification requirements in many states.

Immigrants, who have traditionally not held a strong voice in the democratic or political process, continue to be marginalized. This leads to a distrust of political and governmental institutions on both the state and local level and a lack of involvement in civic life.

An Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission would provide a forum for discussion and a reassurance that the state of Connecticut is looking to increase the involvement of immigrant communities and Asian Pacific American communities in the democratic and political process.

Second, in the last 10 years, the laws and regulations governing immigration have become significantly more stringent and complex. Many recent immigrants encounter problems with expired visas or a change in legal status simply because of an inability to understand or navigate the complicated paperwork and multiple deadlines that characterize the immigration process.

An Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission would provide a resource for recent immigrants in terms of being able to network with other individuals who have dealt with similar immigration issues, and possibly to be put in touch with someone who can address individual questions.

Third, many of today's other speakers in support of House Bill 6002 will address the manifold substantive concerns of the Asian Pacific American communities in Connecticut, ranging from health care to job training to domestic violence. These issues present significant hurdles to many Asian Pacific Americans who are U.S. citizens. Those hurdles increase exponentially for recent immigrants due to linguistic, societal and cultural issues.

An Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission cannot solve every problem that you'll be hearing about today, but it can address many of the hopes and concerns that immigrants – and non-immigrants – have for the future of the Asian Pacific American communities in this great state.

Thank you very much.