

Testimony of Angela Rola
Before the Government Administration and Elections Committee
of the Connecticut General Assembly

March 16, 2007

RE: H.B. 6002 An Act Establishing An Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission

Madame Chairperson/ Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. I am Angela Rola, Director of the University of Connecticut's Asian American Cultural Center at the Storrs campus and a resident of town of Willington. I am here to speak in favor of H.B. 6002 An Act to Establish An Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission.

As an educator who has been working with the Asian Pacific American community in this state for the last fourteen years, I spend much of my time teaching and debunking the model minority myth that plagues our community. Simply defined, the model minority is hard working, never complains, economically and educationally successful, with a strong family structure. While on the surface many of our community members can fit that definition so can members from many other communities. By living under this "model minority" image, real issues facing Asian Pacific Americans are most often glossed over and ignored because no one knows they truly exist not only on a societal level but on a state and federal level as well. Economics, political equality, education, healthcare, glass ceiling issues, and youth concerns go virtually unchecked.

Those of us here today in support of this important bill will speak of these pressing issues that face the APA community. Allow me to address some of the educational concerns. Seventy-four percent of our population are foreign born with over 50% lacking English proficiency. Yet to acquire English proficiency, language instruction for adults is inadequate providing less than the prescribed number of instructional hours per week.

While Asian Pacific American school children make up the largest underrepresented group in 2/3 of Connecticut schools, the number of Asian Pacific American teachers in the classroom has lagged.

In the class that I teach at UConn on Asian American Mentoring & Leadership, virtually every student writes about their experiences of bullying, isolation, discrimination, and in some case neglect in their grammar school, middle school, or high schools. The majority of those students hail from Connecticut public schools. The proliferation of Asian youth gangs is also of concern. Feeling familial and societal pressures, some of our male youth are joining gangs. This behavior could be considered an ultimate form of rebellion against the "model minority" image that can never be fulfilled.

Conversely, while attainment of post baccalaureate and professional degrees are higher in our community than compared to other populations, the rise to management level positions in business or administrative levels in academe is much lower than any other group. The correlation of higher education attainment with economic success does not necessarily play out in our community as far as occupational advancement.

The establishment of an Asian Pacific Affairs Commission will assist the State in addressing the APA issues that we raise today and will help engage a diverse group of citizens who contribute to the well-being of Connecticut. I urge your support of this bill.

Thank you very much.