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Testimony of Representative Tom Reynolds
H.B. 6002, An Act Establishing an Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission
Government Administration and Elections Committee
March 16, 2007

Senator Slossberg, Representative Caruso, and distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee, my name is Representative Tom Reynolds. I am here to testify in support of H.B. 6002, AN ACT ESTABLISHING AN ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN AFFAIRS COMMISSION.

This bill seeks to establish a state governmental entity to advance our understanding and support of the important and unique needs of Connecticut's rapidly growing Asian Pacific American population. I know other speakers will address the unique charge of this new commission. Therefore, I wish to focus on what I have observed in eastern Connecticut.

My district includes Ledyard, Montville and Preston, so it is home to both Native American casinos. As the Cold War ended my region lost 20,000 high paying, defense jobs, which have been replaced by 20,000 low wage service jobs. Many of these jobs have been filled by Asians from across the United States and around the world.

This migration began in 1992 with the opening of Foxwoods. It spiked again in 1996 with the opening of Mohegan Sun. And it spiked yet again in 2001-2002 after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 hurt Chinatown's businesses and forced many Chinese to come to eastern Connecticut for jobs. At Mohegan Sun, 1,400 (14%) of the 10,000 employees are Asian/Pacific Islander. At Foxwoods nearly 2,000 (20%) of the 10,000 employees are Asian.

According to the Chinese and American Culture and Assistance Association of Norwich, over 10,000 Asian families live in a 35-mile radius of the City of Norwich. According to Norwich officials, between 3,000 and 5,000 Chinese live in the city. In Norwich Public

Schools, 117 students speak Cantonese or Mandarin. Hundreds more speak other foreign languages.

Mohegan School, located in the Montville section of my district, has experienced such a dramatic increase in its Asian student population that this year it became the first and only elementary school in the state with enough Chinese speakers to require the establishment of a bilingual program in Chinese. Other area schools report a growing trend of Asian students entering with English as a Second Language or knowing no English at all.

Eastern Connecticut has embraced its role as host for this new and growing population, but we struggle everyday to meet their growing and diverse needs. The establishment of this commission would be a critical step in bringing a strategic focus to many disparate attempts to welcome, transition, orient, and serve our Asian American neighbors and to help them flourish in our region and state and to contribute even more to our state.

Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation.