

Greetings legislators, guests and fellow Asian Pacific Americans,

I am here to ask you to support:

HB- 5321- AN ACT ESTABLISHING AN ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN AFFAIRS COMMISSION.

I have spent most my life in Connecticut, from grammar school through my years at UConn and now as a business entrepreneur in South Windsor. Growing up I was the only Asian Pacific American, or APA, in my school, well until my sister entered kindergarten that is. While there were only a handful in the entire town, my family was fortunate enough to meet several other Chinese and Taiwanese families through organizations such like the Chinese Culture Center and Taiwanese Association of Connecticut. My sister and I went to Chinese School every Sunday, held at Trinity. This was a place where I was able to learn about my culture but most importantly find other Chinese kids who I could relate to. Each of us had experienced being the token APA in town. Chinese School and these organizations gave a place we could call our own. A lot has changed since those days in the 80s; APA's have become the fastest growing population not only across the country but here in Connecticut as well. During my years at Chinese School the enrollment grew from 75 to upwards of 150, today there are over 300 kids at the Hartford Chinese School alone. There are now also schools in New Haven, Greenwich, and New London. There are even programs in "regular schools" teaching Chinese. You may be asking why I share this with you when I am here to talk to you specifically about our impact on business. I truly believe in the support system Chinese School and the organizations provided me and my family while growing up. It gave us a place and resources to turn to and I believe that a similar support system is needed on the state level.

My family has a small business here in South Windsor. We have been doing business in town since 1991. When most people think of an APA business owner, images of a take out Chinese restaurant, a dry cleaner, or a 7 eleven are typically conjured. While these may have been the truths in years past, the Asian American business owner today is much more. My parents immigrated to this country in the 70s; my mother came to pursue her masters in occupational therapy while my father pursued a masters in chemical engineering. In the 80s, my father found a job here in Vernon where he worked as a polymer chemist until he was laid off in 1990. Seeing an ad in the Hartford Courant for a workshop on Small Business Innovative Research Grant writing, my father attended and submitted his first proposal. The topic sought to find a coating to protect helicopter blades from rain and sand erosion. Luckily for my father, there was a gentleman at Kaman Aerospace that was considered a subject expert. My father consulted him, submitted a proposal and won! Sixteen years later, we have completed over 20 government contracts with the Army, Navy and Air Force. Our coatings have been used on Unmanned Air Vehicles for over 3 years and last year we coated two Black Hawk helicopters in Iraq for a full year field trial. The results were phenomenal, showing over 4x better results then current technology and our success has put a large focus on our

technology. We are now known as the world leader in rain and sand erosion protection research. We have broadened our work from just the Unmanned Air Vehicles like the Shadow to the V-22 Osprey, Black Hawk and other platforms both air and sea. Our location in Connecticut has allowed us to work closely with Sikorsky and Kaman Aerospace. Our business is transitioning from solely a research and development facility into a full functioning coating manufacturing supplier for Sikorsky and others companies. We are creating more jobs not only internally but for the other companies that we work with here in Connecticut. While it is a far cry from your take out or dry cleaners, we still underwent many of the same struggles that Asian Pacific Americans small business owners before us had gone through.

While hard work is a cornerstone of APAs and my family's success, luck has also played a great role. During these times, there were no other people in our community to look to for advice. No one had done this before. Most of our APA family friends held jobs at Pratt and Whitney, The Hartford, Aetna, Traveler's or the like. They were scientists, doctors, or engineers of one sort or another. My mother quit her job as an Occupational Therapist to work full time with my father. She had to teach herself accounting systems, accounting, government contracting, and everything else to make the business successful. My father had to learn management skills and how to run an office and staff. With cultural differences and sometimes language barriers, it wasn't easy. This was by far the road less traveled and a lonely road. In other states, APAs can learn from other APA's experiences. There are established resources to gather information where others can learn from one another.

APAs are a broad and diverse group and as such we have broad and diverse matters. Growing up in predominately white suburbs like Vernon, Glastonbury and now South Windsor, there were not many Asian Pacific Americans around to look up to. The majority of my family friends are also immigrants, we were all learning about SATs, college applications, and eventually about the working world together. I graduated from the UConn with a degree in Organizational Communications and Behavior and a minor in business. If I had pursued engineering or medicine I would have plenty of resources to pull from. Instead, after completing college I went into sales. Much like my family business, I took a road less traveled. My family's circle of APAs was all scientists, engineers, doctors. Rarely did I find people even amongst my APA peers who really understood my career or had an idea of what it truly entails. Luckily I had found great mentors at my job and through other involvements.

Today, APAs have so many more avenues to learn from. My peers today are pursuing fields outside the hard sciences and technology; they are becoming accountants, lawyers, teachers, artists, business people, and even politicians. Many of my family friends are now also starting their own businesses that do not involve the restaurants. While we know have grown to over 100,000 in Connecticut, do not let our size take anything away from what we contribute to our state. In Connecticut there are an estimated 341,000 small businesses. Of these small businesses 7,170 are Asian owned and generated over \$1.9 Billion. In comparison 10,309 small businesses are black owned and generated \$723 million, while the 9,408 Hispanics owned businesses totaled \$1.3 billion.

Do the math. APAs are the fastest growing population in the state. According to census data in 2000, 53% of our fast growing population earns more than \$60,000 annually. We hold the highest labor force participation in Connecticut and at 69% it is even 2% higher than whites. Over 95% of our fast growing population is employed. Amazingly, according to those same census numbers, of the 80,000 APAs in Connecticut in 2000, over 25% were under the age of 18. That's 21,000 APAs under 18 in the year 2000. It is now 2008 and many of those 21,000 are now over 18. Even more astonishing, is the statistic that of the population 25 years and over, APAs have the highest percentage of people with a bachelor's degree or higher amongst all races. APAs are a fast growing population that is providing a substantial amount of educated people to the workforce. Our population also has a high employment rate and contributing to our state's overall economy. While our numbers previously may have been easy to ignore, this is no longer the case.

I often wonder what the road would have been like if there was an Asian Pacific American Commission all these years. A place my family could have turned to for advice, a place where others could have come together at events to understand not only what we have to conquer as a small business but also the cultural aspects we fight each day. For me, I can only imagine how nice it would have been to have APAC and know that I was not alone in foraging this trail, not just a number or a statistic. While I'm sure there are others who have started business, pursued a career outside the hard sciences and technology, we currently do not have a place for all these resources to call home. Asian Pacific Americans are a broad group. We have large cultural differences amongst us and also generational differences. The speed of our population growth makes it that much more important to have a support system to address all the issues that lay ahead. Having a fully staffed and functional Asian Pacific American Commission would be a great start. We are growing in numbers. We are reaching out in different avenues of the world, as your colleague William Tong can attest, and most importantly we can no longer afford to be a silent minority. With your help and support we can create a support structure and hub for our future generations to turn to for all their matters relating to their Asian Pacific American roots. I strongly urge you to support additional funding for the Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission.

Very Respectfully,

Jeff Hong
Director of Business Development
Hontek Corporation