

Testimony of Dr. Bidya Ranjeet to the Appropriations Committee
February 11, 2009
RE: Asian Pacific American Commission

Good afternoon Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, and Members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Bidya Ranjeet. I work at the University of Connecticut as Director of Student Support Services and have been a resident of Mansfield, Connecticut since 1983. I am happy to say that over the years the Nepali population has grown exponentially throughout the country especially due to the Diversity Visa Lottery. The Nepali American population is still a relatively new one and does not have a huge network in place so a majority of us are not able to navigate the system here.

The Nepali people in America find little to complain about because they are grateful to be living a more privileged life. But they are unaware of the full service capacity that they are entitled to as citizens and residents of the United States. They are silently coping with domestic violence and mental health issues. A majority of the Nepali Americans have settled for employment that does not fit their educational background. They are complacent and feel that they do not want to be a burden to their new chosen country that has given them an opportunity.

We are hesitant to access health care for our children and any other services that are available to legal residents of Connecticut. I know numerous people who did not collect unemployment when they get pink slips. One family I know chose to be cramped into a friend's apartment until they could find another job rather than collecting unemployment. One of the main reason that people do not collect unemployment or do not access healthcare for themselves or their children is that they worry it would affect the people that sponsored them when they immigrated to the U.S. or that they will not be able to sponsor their own family members from Nepal. Our group simply does not have the information or people who will advocate for them.

My cousin died last summer. He was only 30 years old. Had he gone to the doctor earlier, may be, my aunt wouldn't have lost her beloved son. He had immigrated to the US in 2000 but had been living mostly in Nepal as he wanted to complete his medical school there. He returned to the US in 2007 and was preparing to take his Medical Exam and started not to feel well. For a whole month he was taking over the counter cough and cold medicine. One night when the coughing became unbearable he went to the emergency and the doctor found out he had pneumonia. He was sent home with medicine. After 2 days he went back to the hospital again. This time the hospital found out that the pneumonia had spread to both lungs. He did not return home. I have an education and I work at a university setting but I did not have information to advise him. Imagine what others would do.

A woman is here with me today who had Lyme disease. The doctor gave her a prescription. She went to CVS and got only 3 pills as each pill cost \$10. She had already spent \$100 for the blood test so she didn't purchase the medicine for the prescribed one month period - which would have cost \$300. She told the Pharmacist that she will come back to get the rest. After the three pills she felt a bit better and not knowing that the disease could be fatal she did not fill the prescription. For 3 years she took over the counter medicine thinking her Lyme disease symptoms was a case of arthritis. She finally went to the doctor's office again for a blood test

and got treated for Lyme disease. This time Generation in Willimantic helped her with free services.

I was very happy to learn that the bill had passed to establish a permanent commission for Asian Pacific American. I was pleased to see that finally our voices were going to be heard and our issues were going to be brought out. The APAC commission is just beginning to look at our issues. More than anything, the Nepali American community needs access to information on their basic civil rights as an American citizen or resident. I am urging you today, please do not neglect our needs and please do not sweep our issues under the carpet.

Thank you for your time. I can be reached at bidyranjeet@yahoo.com

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