

Testimony of Nicole Fink
February 11, 2009
RE: Asian Pacific American Commission

Good evening, Chairperson Harp, Chairperson Geragosian and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Nicole Fink and I am a third year student majoring in psychology and part of the pre-law program at the University of Connecticut, Storrs campus and a resident of the town of Brookfield.

I am here today to urge you to reject the Governor's recommendation to eliminate the state commissions for children and minorities, most especially the Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission.

This past year I was given the opportunity to intern at the Public Defender's Office here in Hartford Superior Court, one of the busiest court houses in the state. During the duration of my internship I learned a lot about our criminal justice system, but I also discovered the need for an Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission to help establish better legal services for the Asian Pacific American community.

The court interpreters and translators rotate throughout the courthouses in Connecticut; however there is always a Spanish and/or Portuguese speaking interpreter present in each courthouse. This is not the case for the various Asian dialects. One day a man of Vietnamese descent was arraigned. He needed a Vietnamese translator and it took all morning to locate a Vietnamese translator and then the translator traveled from Greenwich to Hartford. The translator arrived after court was supposed to be closed, but the judge had kept the court open until the translator's arrival. Everyone was eager to get out of court, therefore his arraignment was rushed and the man was basically encouraged to call his embassy, which would most likely end up in his deportation.

Another instance I discovered inadequate services for the APA community was when an elderly Chinese woman, who barely spoke English, was arrested because she tried to pay for something with Chinese food. I watched court marshals, prosecutors her public defender, who was supposed to help her and even the judge laugh and mock the woman, who was obviously scared and confused about what was going on. I sat there and observed how these public servants were so blatantly ignorant of Chinese customs or traditions. Not so long ago, a barter economy was used in China instead of monetary exchanges, especially in the countryside of China. I can understand how this woman, who was most likely an immigrant, was under the presumption that this was an acceptable form of payment. If there had been a Chinese interpreter available in Hartford at the time, this matter would have been thrown out by the judge, but because she did speak a little English, the matter moved forward.

Having an Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission would help support the state to provide better access to things like legal services, to the expanding APA community. The commission can also help to promote cultural awareness among the state's employees. I would like to think that we have out grown our ignorant ways, but unfortunately from what I have observed at my time in the courts, we have not. The Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission can help the government protect the APA community rather than be disregarded because as many people think, Asians are the "model minority." Eliminating the Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission would not only be detrimental now, but also to future generations as well. We need our voice to be heard in the government. We need the Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission. Please consider this when reviewing the Governor's recommendation.

Thank you very much for your time.