

Testimony of Tony Lu in support of the Asian Pacific American Commission

February 11, 2009 before the Appropriations Committee

My parents came to this country after an arduous journey at sea – where they fled an oppressive communist government in Vietnam. They risked everything at a chance for political and economic freedom, and survived on a squalid refugee camp for over a year before arriving in America. For years, they struggled to get by, while trying to provide for my two siblings and me – all the while we lived in the Chinatown projects. When I was younger, my mother always told me to keep my mouth shut, and to proceed in life so that I would not stir ripples in the environment around me. I was not to complain about anything; instead, my focus should have been to stay silent, to do well in school, and then to lead a quiet, successful life on my own.

I must admit that for the majority of my life, I did just that. Now, as a second year law student at UConn Law School, and the co-president of the Asian Pacific American Law Student's Association, I have gained an increasing realization that there are some things that I should not stay silent about and that I should strive to advocate for issues that I deem as important. I cannot think of a more important issue at present than **the establishment of an Asian Pacific American Commission.**

Thinking back, I wonder how many things that my parents themselves have stayed silent about in order to get ahead: most paramount of which is their access to healthcare. It was an uncontested and accepted fact that as small business owners, we were not to have affordable healthcare. As such, I grew up never having gone to a doctor for a checkup, and even when I was sick, I visited a Chinese-American doctor, who was generous enough to charge a lower fee for those – like my family and me – who did not have adequate health coverage. Even so, I tended to shy away from hospitals in general – even when I injured myself during a high school gymnastics competition. Instead of visiting the emergency room, I opted to let my shoulder heal on its own, knowing very well that surgery would be extremely costly for my family who did not have health insurance. I, for one, don't want someone to bypass medical assistance – as I have – in order to not place an additional financial burden on his/her parents, or because it was culturally awkward to step outside of one's comfort zone.

Also, in Massachusetts, my parents had the support of the Chinese and greater Asian community in Boston – starting in the projects of Chinatown, and eventually saving enough to move into the suburbs. Without this support from people and families who shared similar goals, I hardly think my parents would have managed to provide sufficiently for my family and me. Such a concentrated support network is not readily available in Connecticut, even though Asian Americans are slated to be the fastest growing minority group in the state. The Commission is to serve as that support network – to help a diverse and growing minority group to achieve a voice, and to be a forum in which to provide the necessary social support for an ethnic group long taught to be silent in our ways. **I urge the legislature to wholeheartedly support the establishment of the Commission and to provide the necessary funding – however miniscule it may be in the face of such an extraordinary budget in troubled times – in order to further the essential needs of one of the fastest growing, and ethnically diverse populations. Thank you.**

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