



STATE OF
CONNECTICUT
ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN AFFAIRS
COMMISSION



<http://www.cga.ct.gov/asianamerican/>

Senator Harp, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Nakul Havnurkar. I am the Legislative Analyst for the Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission (APAAC). I thank you for taking the time out to have the commissions come in to provide testimony this afternoon.

As you all know the APAAC is the only nonpartisan comprehensive state institution that evaluates laws and policies for their impact on the lives of Asian Pacific Americans (APA's) in Connecticut. The Commission consists of 15 volunteer, legislatively appointed APA advocates, academics, cultural leaders, and business professionals from different geographic areas in Connecticut. Commissioners, with the help of legislative staff, are mandated to provide recommendations to the General Assembly on public policies that affect the APA community.

Starting off, let me make clear- we're not state funded lobbyists. We are an arm of the general assembly and our job is to provide information, analysis, and assistance to the General Assembly, state agencies, state leaders and the public on the status of APA's in Connecticut.

And, despite the opinions of many who think otherwise, State entities need to address the issues/concerns of this community before enacting any legislation or implementing any program that could potentially have an impact on APA's in Connecticut.

The problem is that all too often the APA community is characterized as the "model minority"- they go to the best schools, have the highest paying jobs, and a stable family life- that doesn't need specific representation in state government. This perception, however, places unrealistic expectations on the APA community and discounts the significant number in the APA community that needs advocacy and representation.

In other words because of the "model minority" myth the APA community is, and has historically been, underserved at the local, state, and federal levels despite the fact that the APA community is one of the fastest growing minorities and gaining in social and political influence.

President Obama, in 2009, created the WH Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders to specifically address the needs of this historically underserved population. The Initiative focuses on advancing research and analysis, and data collection for the APA community.

Following President Obama's lead to assess the unmet needs of the APA population by research and data collection, the Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission requests members of the Appropriations Committee to, first and foremost, consider allocating sufficient funds to the Commission for it to conduct an in-depth socio-economic survey of the APA population in Connecticut.

According to the US Census, from 2000 to 2005, the APA population in Connecticut grew more than 30% to approximately 127,000- Note: 53% lack English Language proficiency, 22% has no health insurance, and approximately 12% live below the poverty level. Given that APA's make up only 3.3% of Connecticut's total population, these are disproportionate and alarming figures that need to be studied further.

We urge the Appropriations Committee to increase our total budget for FY 12 and FY 13 by at least \$60,000 for both periods so that we can hire consultants to conduct a state-wide in-depth socio-economic survey. Adjusting for inflation and accounting for Gov. Molloy's proposed lapse reductions, the total operating budget for FY 12 and FY 13 for the APAAC should be at least \$119,949 and \$122,386, respectively.

Needless to say, to achieve "full fledged" Commission status, we'd also like to expand our staff to include a secretary, and possibly an Executive Director. We hope the Committee will consider this request as well.

I realize that some members of the Committee might consider it unreasonable for the APAAC to request an increase in funding for surveys and staff salaries during a deep budgetary crisis, but I believe the request is justified for at least two reasons.

First, even though the APA's population grew by 30% in a 5 year period, substantive data on APA's in Connecticut in virtually all of the quality of life categories is non-existent. Consider, for example, the issue of racial profiling of minorities. Racial profiling is a tremendously important issue that affects the quality of life of the APA community, especially post 9/11. From conversations that I've had with Sikh and Muslim Americans, I know this community has been harassed by Connecticut police officers because of their race.

Without accurate data, however, anecdotal evidence carries little weight. So even though the Alvin Penn Act of 1999 requires police departments to record and report the race of motorists in traffic stops to the General Assembly annually, only 20 out of 102 Connecticut police departments actually comply with the law, and as a result, the APAAC has no reliable data on how many Sikhs and Muslims were pulled over, possibly because of their race, to bring to the legislature's attention.

An in-depth socio-economic survey would provide, among other things, concrete reliable data on APA's who feel they have been victims of discrimination or harassment by government officials. And, without question, the APAAC can analyze and report this data to the General Assembly so that it is equipped with the proper information in crafting effective legislation.

Now, the second justification for requesting a budget increase is that fairness and equity requires the APAAC's budget to be comparable to the other legislative commissions. In FY 11 our total budget was \$52,310 which was just enough to hire a legislative analyst.

Other Commissions not only have more funding for staff salaries, but also specific allocations for conducting surveys, implementing programs, and increasing community involvement through outreach events.

Let me be clear here- my intention is not to imply that the other legislative commissions should be reduced in size at all. All commissions represent underserved vulnerable communities and provide a sizable value for a minimal investment.

My point is that it is unreasonable for the General Assembly to expect, and the Governor to propose, that the APAAC, with its minimal budget, carry out its mandate for the next biennium with the same level of funding when all other commissions have significantly higher operating budgets to fulfill essentially the same legislative mandate as ours. Equity requires an increase in our funding.

This is not to say that we haven't been working within our allowable means in FY 11 to fulfill our mandate. Below are some highlights of the things we've accomplished as a Commission since August 2010:

- Hosted a voter registration booth to increase the number of registered APA voters in Connecticut.
- Held a collaborative informational forum with the US Attorney's office, the State Attorney's office, and the FBI on the rights of individuals who have been victims of harassment and discrimination.
- Met with Montville Town Council on two separate occasions to address the issue of the lack of affordable housing in the area for Chinese immigrant casino workers.
- Celebrated the Chinese Lunar New Year at the LOB.
- Testified on HB 5464, AAC State Employees and Violence and Bullying in the workplace.
- Testified on HB 5340, AA Renaming the State Police Forensic Science Laboratory as the "Dr. Henry C. Lee Forensic Science Laboratory"
- Been part of coalitions which made recommendations on HB 5535- AA Strengthening School Bullying Laws and on SB 40- AA Allowing Children of Undocumented Immigrant Aliens to Qualify for Instate Tuition.
- Set up a database of all cities/towns in Connecticut that has a sister-city relationship with cities in Asia or the Pacific Islands.

These are just some of the initiatives that the APAAC has taken to help gain our state recognition as a leader on APA issues. And we're eager to work with the General Assembly, state agencies, and others going forward. But we are also proud of the work we have been able to deliver, the leadership we have been able to provide, and the ability to lend voice to the policies that affect the life of every APA in Connecticut.

Thank you,



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<u>Expense Category</u>	<u>FY 2010-2011 Estimated</u>	<u>FY 2011-2012 Estimated</u>	<u>FY 2012-2013 Estimated</u>
Executive Director	\$ -	\$ 99,621.00	\$ 99,621.00
Office Assistant	\$ -	\$ 32,736.00	\$ 32,736.00
Legislative Analyst	\$ 49,810.00	\$ 49,810.00	\$ 49,810.00
Other Expenses	\$ 2,500.00	\$ 6,800.00	\$ 6,800.00
Equipment	\$ -	\$ 1,500.00	\$ 1,500.00
TOTAL	\$ 52,310.00	\$ 190,467.00	\$ 190,467.00