

The Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission Needs to Remain a Separate Commission

By Sheila Sinha Charmoy

My name is Sheila Sinha Charmoy. I live in Trumbull, Connecticut and practice family law in Fairfield Connecticut. I sit in the Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission as the Commissioner for Fairfield County.

The Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission is very important as it provides a clear and direct voice to the legislature and governor of the unique problems and needs of the Asian Pacific American (hereinafter called APA) Community. The APA Community especially needs a Commission to advocate on our behalf as typically culturally we are the type of people who believe in keeping quiet and not making waves. So our children are more likely to be bullied, our people are more likely to be discriminated against in the work place, educational arena, and media. Our people are not likely to stand forward if they are victims of racial profiling as well. The fact that the Commission exists gives our people the opportunity to turn to the Commission to advocate on their behalf.

For example, the Commission received a phone call from an APA family who lived in a small Connecticut town. One of their children felt uncomfortable in a class because the teacher was making inappropriate jokes and mimicking a Chinese accent. The Commission followed up with the school and the family to make sure that they knew that this family had the support of the Commission.

The Commission was able to support the Sikh community after the shootings in Oak Creek, Wisconsin by attending and speaking at a candlelight vigil held at the Gurdwara in Southington. We have also made our selves available and present to the Karen community, which has a whole set of unique concerns of their own, being a displaced people in a new country with the added hardship of a language barrier. The Commission has worked to unify the APA business community by creating the CAB Awards which awards leading APA business people in our state for their contributions to the community, and by creating a "cash mob" event in Manchester in support of a local South Asian grocery store. The Commission plans on doing a "Cash Mob" event at least three or four times a year at various APA businesses throughout the state. The Commission has lent its support to the creation of a Little Asia in Bridgeport, by facilitating a press conference and having a meeting in Bridgeport. The Commission has been actively looking at the state's Anti-Bullying legislation, and is trying to revive the State's Anti-Hate Coalition. The Commission has made great strides in the past year in spreading the word that the Commission exists as a valuable tool for the APA community to address their concerns with the government of our state.

It is very important that the Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission remains a separate entity because as a minority group, APA's experience unique problems and circumstances. Unlike the other minority commissions, APA immigrants experience the problem of a language barrier, which thereby impedes our access to medical care, education, and

the legal system. Additionally, as stated above, APA's are less likely to advocate for themselves, report instances of discrimination or bullying, and ask the surrounding community for help. Additionally, the Commission serves as a central hub for all the various APA cultures in the state, for example, the Commission has compiled a list of interpreters to provide services for the various APA languages.

Personally, as a Commissioner I have been able to link three different APA groups together: SNEHA, the South Asian Bar Association of Connecticut and APAAC thereby allowing all three groups to pool their resources. For example, a fellow lawyer from the South Asian Bar Association who works for legal aid, contacted me to connect her with a Vietnamese-speaking interpreter. I was able to connect her to the Executive Director of the Commission, thereby helping to ensure that this Vietnamese woman was able to get legal help and services. This is the exact sort of situation for which the Commission was created. The Commission serves the purpose of connecting all the various APA Organizations in the state, as well as unifying all the various APA communities in the state.

By taking away the Commission, the state will be taking away the sole vehicle the APA community has to address their concerns to the Legislature and to the Governor. Additionally the state will be taking away the one unifying organization that is available to connect the various APA organizations in the state. If APAAC were to be combined with the other minority Commissions, the APA population in Connecticut will lose the ability to have that direct voice to the legislature and the governor through the advocacy of the Commissioners. The concerns of the larger minority groups in this state will overshadow the concerns of the APA community, which is much smaller in comparison. Finally, the Commission is needed now more than ever, as the APA population in Connecticut is growing by leaps and bounds.