

Testimony of Theodore Feng
Before the Appropriations Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly
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The Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission
Needs to Remain a Separate Commission

My name is Theodore Feng and I live in New Fairfield, Connecticut. I am a member of the Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission and also the Assistant Director of UAW Region 9A.

I am here today to testify in support of keeping the Asian Commission as a distinct, stand-alone Commission and recommend that it not be consolidated with other Commissions into a single entity as outlined in the Governor's budget proposal. In fact, I support keeping all of the Commissions unique and distinct. As a labor representative for a diverse union like the UAW, I believe under-represented minority communities should have a voice and that the distinct voices of Asians, African-Americans, Latinos and women will be lost through consolidation.

According to the 2010 U.S. Census, Asians are the fastest growing minority population in the country and has increased by 65% in Connecticut alone. This is evident in Connecticut, in part, because of the thousands of Asian workers employed at the state's casinos, who along with their families, live in the southeastern part of the state. The UAW represents over 2,000 casino dealers at Foxwoods where nearly 40% are Asian, many who are recent immigrants or first generation Americans originating from a diversity of nations such as China, Taiwan, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, India, Tibet, the Philippines, Japan and Korea.

Besides dealers, there are many other Asian casino workers in other job classifications - housekeeping, maintenance, marketing, customer service, valet, food and beverage service, chefs, bartenders, and management.

On a regular basis, the UAW Local Union representing the dealers handles ongoing challenges for its Asian union members as well as non-bargaining unit Asian workers who come to the union seeking help or have questions on a number of fronts, including discrimination on the job, voting rights, access to housing, health care barriers, enrolling their kids in school, tenant-landlord disputes and questions on navigating state agency and court processes.

While the UAW does everything it can to assist Asian community members that come to us, our experience is that the challenges for such a diverse population statewide stem primarily from unique cultural, social and language barriers.

This is why we need a unique, separate Commission. In the short time the Commission has been in existence and with a limited budget, the Commission is actively engaged in addressing

- Bullying and harassment in schools, the workplace and the community.
- Improving healthcare access by establishing a language bank to assist in effective communication in a diversity of Asian languages.
- Promoting civic engagement through voter registration drives.
- Advocating for more Asian-owned businesses to have equal opportunity to win state contracts.

The consolidation of the Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission into a single Commission would effectively limit or eliminate a needed voice to advocate for our diverse communities. Although many members of Asian Pacific American (APA) communities have overcome great hardship and have made outstanding contributions to the economic, educational, technological and cultural well being of the state, we still face many challenges in our efforts for full social, economic, and political integration in the state.

Furthermore, we are part of a global economy. The Governor recognizes this with his recent trip last year to the World Economic Forum Summit in China to promote Connecticut's businesses and to try to attract Chinese and other Asian investment in the state. As a result, our Commission has had inquiries from Chinese business leaders on why they should invest and locate in Connecticut rather than New York. The Commission of course is advocating for investment in Connecticut and is another example of the how the state can benefit from a distinct Commission, costing only pennies per taxpayer, that can act as a cultural and ethnic bridge to increase the potential for economic investment and job creation in our state.

In closing, I believe that consolidating the Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission into a single Commission would be moving backwards at a time when our state needs to move forward – to ensure that our diverse, under represented Asian communities are equally served by the state and have equality of opportunity and equality of outcome socially, economically and politically.

I thank the Committee for hearing my views and respectfully ask that you consider keeping the Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission a distinct, unique Commission.

