

February 19 2013

Greetings Honorable Senators and Representatives,

My name is Sounthaly Thammavong; I am a UConn School of Social Work Masters student focusing on Policy Practice. I also serve as a board member of the Asian Pacific Affairs Coalition of Connecticut (APAC-CT), the nonprofit that organized the Call to Action for the Establishment of the Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission (APAAC) into state legislature.

I am here to testify against the formation of the Commission on Citizen Advocacy (CCA) on behalf of the Asian Pacific American (APA) community here in Connecticut. By eliminating the Commission on Aging, we devalue the needs of our parents and grandparents. By combining Commissions that support children, women's rights as well as representing three minority groups; priorities will become shifted. I am against the consolidation of the Commissions and hope that you will not support it.

The APAAC was established in 2008 due to community organizing and political mobility of the APA community in Connecticut. According to the 2010 Census, APA's are also Connecticut's fastest growing minority. By combining these Commissions, the APA community will continue to lose their voice when it comes to issues of immigration and education for underrepresented groups such as the Burmese. At UConn on the Storrs campus, APA students make up almost 9% of the student body; this does not reflect the growing numbers of international students from Asia.

Community organizations and non-profits are already underfunded and are running out of resources. By combining the Commissions we reduce the available resources to deal with uniquely diverse situations.

As a former Case Manager at Asian Family Services, Connecticut's only Mental Health and Substance Abuse clinic for Southeast Asians, we were understaffed and had little resources available within Hartford's catchment area. Currently as a MSW policy student, I continue to see the dearth of resources available to new Asian immigrants and refugees flooding into Connecticut.

By combining these Commissions, the underrepresented Southeast Asian minority will continue to lose their voice by having nowhere to turn for support. The 'Model Minority Myth' continues to plague Asian Americans which can be seen in the underrepresentation of Lao, Cambodian and Vietnamese Americans in Higher Education. As the most recent Asian minority groups, like the Burmese, migrate into Connecticut they struggle with housing, education, job assistance and health care. By combining these Commissions, these new migrants will continue to slip through the cracks as other issues and needs become prioritized before their own.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify and I would be very happy to answer and questions that you may have.

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