



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN AFFAIRS COMMISSION

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March 20, 2015

Dear Senator Coleman, Representative Tong, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Alok Bhatt, Legislative Analyst for the Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission (APAAC). APAAC serves as a liaison between Connecticut's Asian Pacific American (APA) population and state policy makers. Our primary areas of concern include civil rights, education, economic development, health access, housing, and other issues impacting the APA community's quality of life.

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As the sole agency charged with informing the State of issues facing the APA community in Connecticut, and in solidarity with all who experience systematic disparities, APAAC writes in strong support of SB 1114: An Act Concerning the Commission on Racial and Ethnic Disparity in the Criminal Justice System.

Very little data exists on the APA community's interaction with Connecticut's criminal justice system. Brief perusal of Department of Corrections (DOC) statistics indicates that, between the years 2000 and 2004, APAs were arrested for Larceny at far greater rates than violent offenses, such as Murder, Aggravated Assault, Rape, or Robbery¹. In 2003, APAs, who represented approximately 4% of the population of the State of Connecticut at the time, represented .6% of the state's incarcerated population, and .5% of the state's supervised population². Though these general numbers do not seem to indicate significant disparities facing the APA population, mere statistics do not present the narrative or experiences on the ground.

Although APAs do not populate Connecticut prisons in great numbers, they face significant barriers navigating the justice system. Courts typically do not translate pertinent legal documents into Asian or Pacific Island languages, leaving Limited English Proficient (LEP) with little help to discover and utilize critical resources. Furthermore, court interpreters play an indispensable role in ensuring APA access to the criminal justice system, yet our courts typically rely on telephonic interpretation for low-diffusion, and sometimes even major, languages. An individual sitting unknowable miles away on the other end of a receiver can hardly serve as an adequate substitute for a culturally competent and linguistically trained interpreter to guarantee that a defendant comprehends his or her rights and responsibilities during judicial proceedings. These same concerns weigh heavily on the futures of all world language speakers in the State of Connecticut.

Furthermore, APAAC cannot accept the appalling disparities facing our brothers and sisters in the Black and Latino communities in the criminal justice system. Our Black and Latino community members face the justice system at greater rates and younger ages than APAs and all other groups. These profound and historic inequalities must be addressed with sustainable solutions to ensure the best future for the State of Connecticut, the United States, and our increasingly connected world.

APAAC strongly hopes the Commission proposed in SB 1114 can contribute to the

¹ <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2008/rpt/2008-R-0008.htm>

² <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2003/olrdata/jud/rpt/2003-R-0837.htm>

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discovery of such solutions, and looks forward to collaborating with all possible partners in effectuating sound and just policy in the State of Connecticut. Although we specifically serve the APA community, APAAC represents the equality and equity of all people, regardless of ethnicity, economic status, or any other aspect. We will continue to pursue policies, programs, and activities which further these goals.

Respectfully Submitted,

Alok Bhatt
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