



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN AFFAIRS COMMISSION



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Legislative Analyst

Alok Bhatt

February 20, 2015

Dear Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter, and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee,

My name is Alok Bhatt. I serve as Legislative Analyst for the Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission (APAAC/the Commission). The Connecticut General Assembly established APAAC in 2008 to engage and advocate for our state's Asian Pacific American (APA) population. This population consists of peoples originating from over 60 countries, speaking at least as many distinct languages and dialects.

In supporting the civil and human rights of all world language speakers, the Commission testifies in strong support of House Bill 5894: An Act Increasing the Availability of Licensed Medical Interpreters for Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Patients (HB 5894).

While APAs comprise less than 5% of Connecticut's total population, we have high linguistic diversity, with nearly 1/3 of all APAs in Connecticut identifying as Limited English Proficient. Presently, only a small number of local providers focus on culturally and linguistically appropriate services for APA populations. In meeting the complex challenges and needs of small, diverse populations, Connecticut health systems, particularly acute care hospitals, must improve and diversify their knowledge, staff, and operations to grant equal access to world language speakers.

In 2014, APAAC and community partners including Khmer Health Advocates (KHA), Connecticut Coalition for Mutual Assistance Association (CCMAA), and the Lao Association of Connecticut (LACT) conducted a snowball sample Needs Assessment survey our concentrating on Southeast Asian groups, 42% of Cambodian 14% of Laotian, and 31% of Vietnamese community members reported 'Often or Always' experiencing language barriers with their MD. The Commission unacceptable for growing populations in our state to face such barriers to basic human rights such as health care.

The Commission and our partners in advocacy, including the Hispanic Federation of Connecticut, LanguageLink interpreter services, Eastern Area Health Education Center (AHEC), and others, have crafted modifications to the Senate counterpart of HB 5894, SB 856. Our amendments push past mere compliance with Title VI of the Civil

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Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits providers receiving federal funds from discriminating against any individual or group due to language.

Our proposal will keep Connecticut consistent with federally recognized Culturally & Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) standards and enable hospitals to adopt and advance best practices, which can lead to providing the greatest services possible. Furthermore, we believe our proposed changes will help ensure that Connecticut residents who speak world languages receive the best quality assistance to meet their health needs.

In recognizing the human rights of APAs and all world language speakers in Connecticut, APAAC urges the Public Health committee to adopt our coalition's amendments to SB 856, and pass this critical bill into state law.

APAAC appreciates your time and consideration of this highly important matter.

Sincerely,

Alok Bhatt
Legislative Analyst, Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission

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