



# STATE OF CONNECTICUT

## ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN AFFAIRS COMMISSION



**Address:**

18-20 Trinity Street  
Room 202  
Hartford, CT 06106  
**Tel:** 860-240-0080  
**Fax:** 860-240-0315  
**Email:** apaac@cga.ct.gov  
**Website:**  
<http://ctapaac.com>

**Chair**

Trung Le

**Vice-Chair**

Sylvia Ho, Esq.

**Secretary**

Uswah Khan

**Treasurer**

Alan Tan

**Commissioners**

Arlene Avery  
Theodore Feng  
Theodore Hsu  
George Mathanool  
M. Angela Rola  
Arvind Shaw  
An-Ming Truxes

**Executive Director**

Mui Mui Hin-McCormick

**Legislative Analyst**

Alok Bhatt

Dear Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter, and esteemed members of the Public Health Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Alok Bhatt. I serve as Legislative Analyst for the Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission (APAAC).

In supporting health equity in the State of Connecticut, APAAC writes in strong support of House Bill 5459: An Act Concerning Training in Cultural Competency for Dental Hygienists (HB 5459).

As with many health services, language and culture may represent significant barriers to accessing oral care<sup>1</sup>. Asian Pacific Americans (APA) represent approximately 4% of the total Connecticut population, with over 31% of all APAs in our state identifying as Limited English Proficient (LEP)<sup>23</sup>. The small size, great diversity, and geographic diffusion of Connecticut's APA population can lead to gaps in important services, as well as in assessment of need in these communities.

HB 5459 requires at least one hour of continuing education in cultural competency for dental hygienists seeking license renewal. The proposal requires that education activities be recognized by dental schools or national accreditation organizations, such as the American Dental Association (ADA). While we do not have the expertise to speak definitively on the sufficiency of only one hour of cultural competency training, we hope the Committee would recognize the importance of this subject matter in oral and other health fields. Oral health providers must receive ongoing training in addressing needs in an increasingly diverse population.

Studies in oral health disparities have also determined a correlation between unmet dental care needs and lower socioeconomic levels. According to data collected from National Health Interview Surveys, 14% of Native Hawaiians or other Pacific Islanders (NHOPI) have unmet dental care needs due to cost<sup>4</sup>. Approximately 12% of NHOPIs in Connecticut live in households where income in the past 12 months fell

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.mohc.org/files/accesstodentalcare.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://ctbythenumbers.info/2015/04/15/asian-population-grows-in-ct-and-us-becomes-more-suburban-as-challenges-persist/>

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/ad/ad336.pdf>

**18-20 Trinity Street, Hartford, CT 06106**  
**Tel. (860) 240-0080, Fax (860) 240-0315**  
**E-Mail: [apaac@cga.ct.gov](mailto:apaac@cga.ct.gov)**  
**Web Site – <http://ctapaac.com/>**



# STATE OF CONNECTICUT

## *ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN AFFAIRS COMMISSION*



below the poverty level<sup>5</sup>. Though Connecticut's NHOPI population hardly registers at over 1,000 residents, we cannot allow the size of a particular ethnic population to determine whether providers in our state can address its basic needs, such as access to health services.

In moving towards a healthier Connecticut, as well as addressing the needs of marginalized communities, ongoing cultural competency education for dental hygienists must promote awareness of disparities among different ethnic groups.

Dental hygienists are often the first, and sometimes only, health professional patients see when seeking dental care. Providing dental hygienists with training in care for diverse populations can improve their capacity to educate patients on proper preventive care and address other unmet dental care needs.

I thank you for your time and consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

Alok Bhatt  
*Legislative Analyst, APAAC*

---

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates