



March 7, 2018

The Honorable Andrew Fleischmann
Connecticut General Assembly
Co-Chair, Education Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 3101
Hartford, CT 06106

The Honorable Gayle S. Slossberg
Connecticut State Senate
Co-Chair, Education Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 3300
Hartford, CT 06106

The Honorable Toni Boucher
Connecticut State Senate
Co-Chair, Education Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 3400
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Co-Chairs Andrew Fleischmann, Gayle Slossberg, and Toni Boucher:

This letter is submitted on behalf of the Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC) to **strongly oppose S.B. 359, "An act prohibiting the disaggregation of student data by ethnic subgroups in the public school information system."** Founded in 1979, SEARAC is a national civil rights organization that empowers Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, Vietnamese, and other communities of color. We represent the largest community of refugees ever to be resettled in America. Today, our community numbers more than 3 million nationwide. Connecticut is home to approximately 16,000 Southeast Asian Americans.

Collectively, we **strongly oppose S.B. 359**, which would prohibit the disaggregation of student data by ethnic subgroup. The proposed policy solution creates **dangerous precedence to institutionalize new systemic barriers** that prevent:

- The most neglected within the Asian American community from being seen, heard, and served.
- Further potential progress to be made that has broad-based, national support from diverse civil rights communities.
- Respectful dialogue on the true costs and benefits of collecting data that does not perpetuate unfounded fear.

The impacts of the proposed bill are described further below.

Neglects the needs of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) ethnic groups, such as Southeast Asian Americans, who continue to face stark education disparities.

For more than two decades, SEARAC and many AAPI organizations and community members have educated Members of Congress, state leaders, and other policymakers on the importance of collecting disaggregated ethnic data to **reveal the hidden disparities** that our communities experience in education outcomes, economic security, and health.



The monolithic “Asian” data category glosses over huge variation in socioeconomic outcomes among the 48 different Asian American Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) ethnic groups. Smaller ethnic groups like Southeast Asian Americans, who face high poverty rates and low education attainment rates, are rendered invisible when data is not broken down by ethnic group. Among Asian Americans generally, only 14% of adults have less than a high school diploma.¹ **But 34% of Cambodian, 30% of Hmong, 30% of Lao, and 28% of Vietnamese American adults have less than a high school diploma – twice the percentage or more of Asian Americans overall.**² However, this data is only available through the U.S. Census for adults over the age of 25. Collecting data by ethnicity allows our students to be seen at the K-12 level so that interventions by policymakers and educators can be tailored to stop these inequities from growing. **Prohibiting the collection of ethnic data as proposed in S.B. 359 prevents policymakers from seeing and addressing the disparities that entire communities of students are experiencing and have experienced for decades, further perpetuating these inequities.**

Blocks decades of broad-based support from the civil rights community and national will.

Those who stand up for the civil rights of communities such as Southeast Asian, national AANHPI, and civil rights organizations have **historically and resoundingly supported data** disaggregation policies **at the state** (California, Minnesota, Rhode Island, and Washington) and **federal levels** (e.g. All Students Count Act, US Department of Education’s D2 grant, White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders). The most recent federal legislations on data disaggregation to collect data by Asian American ethnic groups garnered bipartisan support from **63 members of Congress**, more than **1,000 community members**, **100 state and regional organizations**, and **62 national organizations** like the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, National Women’s Law Center, National Urban League, League of United Latin American Citizens, Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, and the National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education. National educators, including both the National Education Association and the American Federal Teachers Union, also supported the policy. **S.B. 359 undermines the national will that has been demonstrated through both AANHPI and the broader civil rights communities to protect and defend the rights of students who are currently rendered invisible, to be seen and heard through more detailed reporting of ethnic data.**

This policy is in **direct opposition** to the policies that **civil rights communities** have resoundingly supported. S.B. 359 does more than bolster the status quo, which only requires state education agencies to collect data on the broad Asian category. By prohibiting the collection of additional data, S.B. 359 **constructs additional institutional barriers** that will make it more difficult for students to be seen and heard.

Respectful dialogue that does not perpetuate unfounded fear

In a press release dated February 16, 2018, Rep. Tong referred to collecting disaggregated education data as equivalent to an “Asian registry.” This language is deliberately inflammatory

¹ U.S. Census, American Community Survey, 2016 5-Year Estimates.

² U.S. Census, American Community Survey 2015 5-Year Estimates, ethnicity alone or in any combination.



and misleading. Indeed, a small group of critics have likened disaggregated data to historical atrocities like Japanese American concentration camps and even the Holocaust. This is intentionally deceptive, a misrepresentation of history, and **fake news**. These critics represent a small but vocal community who do **not** represent the interests or shared analysis of the larger AANHPI community.

Historical facts from U.S. history tells us that what created the Japanese American concentration camps was in fact Executive Order 9066, a policy that led to the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans without regard to due process, liberty, freedom, or justice. Executive Order 9066 was enacted without data collection. This heinous misrepresentation of the issue undermines the real human rights violations experienced by those whose histories are being manipulated to frighten community members and policymakers alike. These **fear-mongering tactics** have no place in respectful dialogue about vulnerable students who deserve to be seen and heard, i.e. **honest dialogue about the facts of the issue**.

Breaking down education data by ethnicity simply ensures that all diverse AANHPI communities are **seen and understood** by policymakers. **Prohibiting** this data collection, as proposed in this bill, disempowers policymakers and prevents them from making sound, data-driven decisions to allocate resources that meet the needs of each distinct AANHPI community. As dedicated elected officials whose values are to protect all communities, especially those who are most vulnerable, we implore you to do what's right and stand up for our students and communities by opposing S.B. 359.

We strongly oppose S.B. 359, and urge the Committee to reject it.

Sincerely,

Quyen Dinh
Executive Director
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)

cc:
Joint Education Committee members
Representative William Tong