Education Committee Public Hearing, Testimony Re: SB359 - AN ACT PROHIBITING THE DISAGGREGATION OF STUDENT DATA BY ETHNIC SUBGROUPS IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL INFORMATION SYSTEM

March 8th, 2018

Good Morning Co-Chairs Boucher, Slossberg & Fleischmann, Vice-Chairs Somers, Sanchez & Bye, Ranking Member Lavielle, and esteemed members of the Education Committee:

I testify today in strong support of SB 359, An Act Prohibiting the Disaggregation of Student Data by Ethnic Subgroups in the Public School Information System. The purpose of this bill is to prohibit the collection of disaggregated student data on specific ethnic subgroups unless such student data is required by federal law or collected uniformly across the entire population of students. Collecting specific student data on ethnicity and heritage may well prove highly problematic and is certainly discriminatory if it is not collected from all students. This bill acts to ensure that no student will be unfairly categorized by their ethnicity or ancestral national origin in our educational system.

Data disaggregation disproportionately affects minority groups, particularly Asian Americans. A letter from the Asian American Coalition to the Common Application, written in 2017, details how the Common App uses data disaggregation to discriminate against Asian American applicants. The Common App does disaggregate information on different groups of people who may be classified as white in the way that it does for Asian-Americans, a much
smaller share of the population. For instance, why should Asian Americans have to specify whether they originate from Thailand or China when white people do not have to specify whether they originate from Germany or Ireland? Applying different classifications and practices toward different groups based on race, ethnicity or national origin is discriminatory.

Registries like those that could be created under targeted disaggregation assisted in the infamous internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. This is an extreme, yet relevant piece of evidence when discussing the harm data disaggregation can cause. Although Data Disaggregation is not always sinister in nature, it opens up the possibility of intentional and unfair targeting of certain groups, and history has shown the potential consequences. Although this bill explicitly states that individual subgroups may not be targeted, I believe stronger language is necessary to ensure that the data that could potentially be collected would not be used to discriminate in any way. Discrimination is always wrong and the state of Connecticut should take the simple step of passing SB 359 to prevent unfair situations like the one described above from crippling its minority residents.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. dreamt of a day when Americans would “not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.” King’s dream is exactly what data disaggregation works against. It takes the entirety of a person’s character, strengths, and uniqueness and narrows it down to one very specific box for a student to check. Many minorities in America came to this country to escape such categorization, stereotyping, and discrimination. Data disaggregation would require many American-born children to fill in school forms regarding their ancestry that force them to choose between their present reality and their ancestry. Why should we force them to make that choice? We must balance our hunger for data with the reality that most of these children would proudly consider themselves “American”, and do not characterize themselves with the nation or origin they could be forced to choose if this legislation did not pass.

Data can be incredibly useful in identifying achievement gaps and fighting inequality, but we must ensure that the laws we pass do not allow for well-intentioned data collection to be utilized in a negative or discriminatory manner. Please listen to the concerns of our constituents. Please listen to their advocates. Please do not allow for the creation of an Asian Registry. Please support SB 359. Thank You.