March 6, 2018
Lee Johnson
70 Howe St, #308
New Haven, CT 06511

Testimony of Lee Helen Johnson
Ph.D. Candidate in American Studies, Yale University
Member, Yale Asian American Studies Task Force

My name is Lee Johnson and I am a Ph.D. student in American Studies at Yale University. I have lived and worked in New Haven, CT for the past five years and grew up in New England (Massachusetts). As a Chinese American person, I identify as Asian American and I learned about RSB 359 through the Yale Asian American Studies Task Force. I stand in opposition to RBS 359.

This issue is important to me in both personal and professional ways. Personally, as an Asian American student, whose identity has been reported through data on Asian Americans, it is important to me that the privileges that I have benefitted from (parents who have advanced degrees, coming from a middle class background, etc.) do not misrepresent my community as a whole. Many of my Asian American friends, peers, and colleagues have had to face challenges that I have not faced in the educational context. This has been reflected in their academic performance and oftentimes directly influenced by their differing backgrounds. This is not to essentialize those backgrounds but to emphasize that this is a significant variable of analysis when considering Asian American populations.

Professionally, my area of academic specialization is in Asian American Studies and Asian American History. I have also worked with hundreds of Asian American students at Yale University in my role as Interim Co-Director of the Asian American Cultural Center at Yale. As an academic in the field, it is my professional opinion that it is antithetical to ethical data analysis practices to prohibit or limit the disaggregation of student data by ethnic subgroup, especially when that information can help teachers, administrators, scholars, and policy-makers further support students from marginalized backgrounds. In order to better understand these disparities and help those in need, we absolutely must disaggregate data on Asian American students, and by ethnic group is one important way to examine these disparities.

The Asian American community is not a monolith and, as a racial group, the community encompasses some of the starkest disparities when it comes to socioeconomic status, education background, and educational support. Historically, this is shaped by the migration of individual ethnic groups and the circumstances in which they have arrived in this country. In order to understand why and how certain populations are more or less successful in an educational context, we must be able to acquire the specific data on students from varying ethnic backgrounds. I hope my testimony is considered as an opinion from a specialist in the Asian American History and as an Asian American community member. I stand in opposition to RSB 359.