To the Honorable Members of the Education Committee:

I’m writing in opposition to Senate Bill 359 which seeks to prohibit the collection of disaggregated student data on specific ethnic subgroups except when mandated by federal law or collected uniformly at the statewide level. Disaggregation of student data is an invaluable tool in determining how to develop equitable and effective policies. A data gathering system that is unable to distinguish among ethnicities, nationalities, and races is an ineffective and misguided system. Such a system leads policy makers to make uninformed decisions, which in turn do not serve the very constituency most in need of equitable and effective policies.

Disaggregated student data allows for a full and nuanced understanding of community needs by making the specific needs of ethnic, national, and racial subgroups visible. Students who identify as Chinese, Afghan, Korean, and Hmong may all have a limited choice on most forms of identifying as “Asian”, though each community is very unique. Aggregated data treats diverse communities such as those listed above as homogeneous, masking ethnic and cultural specificities and the unique needs of a given population. If the ethnic, racial, and national identities of our students cannot be seen, then the students themselves cannot be seen and the long-time, systemic inequities they face will not be visible to those making decisions on their behalf.

Many supporters of Bill 359 cite fears that children will be unfairly targeted if singled out based on their ethnic origins. Families are understandably apprehensive of subjecting their children to a sentence of ‘perpetual foreigner,’ but disaggregated data is not the source of inequity. Data collection that recognizes difference is necessary to assess systemic inequity. Without comprehensive data reflecting the disparities endemic to specific communities,
educators and advocates cannot see the problems they are trying to solve. The existing disparities in educational opportunity among different races and ethnicities can only be addressed if we are able to courageously acknowledge inequity exists, honestly confront accurate data, and boldly work to change the system.

Tanya Kimball Genn
Manager of Youth Services
IRIS - Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services
New Haven, CT 06511