March 6, 2018

R.S.B. No. 359 AN ACT PROHIBITING THE DISAGGREGATION OF STUDENT DATA BY ETHNIC SUBGROUPS IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL INFORMATION SYSTEM

Good afternoon, honorable members of the Education Committee.

My name is Shirley Ma, and I am a resident of the Town of Glastonbury. I am submitting this testimony in OPPOSITION to R.S.B. No. 359 An Act Prohibiting The Disaggregation Of Student Data By Ethnic Subgroups In The Public School Information System.

I believe there is much misrepresentation and harmful rhetoric associated with R.S.B. No. 359. Let’s be clear, there is no Asian Registry. It is also not a means of preventing that exceptional Chinese American child from attending the Ivy League college of their choice.

What it does intend to do is provide a way to identify and thereby reduce the disparities experienced by the twenty different ethnic subgroups that make up the state’s approximate 150,000 Asian American and Pacific Islander population. Data is needed to better serve those Asian American and Pacific Islander Connecticut residents who do not fit into the tidy myth of the model minority.

According to the Pew Research Center, there is a great disparity amongst the many different Asian groups¹. For example, while the median annual household income of Asian households is $73,060 as compared with $53,600 among all US households, this figure belies the fact that Bangladeshi Americans have a median household income of $49,800, Hmong Americans have a median household income of $48,000, Nepalese Americans have a median household income of $43,500, and Burmese Americans have a median household income of $36,000. Contrast this with Indian households that have a median income of $100,000. To further bust the model minority myth, eight of the nineteen Asian groups analyzed by the Pew Research Center have poverty rates much higher than the national average of 15.1%. The Burmese and Bhutanese poverty rates are more than double the national average. For the Hmong, 24.2% lived in poverty in 2015.²

This disparity continues in education level among Cambodians, Hmong, Laotians, and Bhutanese wherein each subgroup has a rate of bachelor’s degree attainment of less than 20% compared to 51% of the general Asian population, with Taiwanese Americans having the highest rate of bachelor’s degree attainment at 77% (2015).

¹ http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/08/key-facts-about-asian-americans/
While Asian American women may have the longest life span of any ethnic group in the US, factors such as fear of deportation, language and cultural barriers, and the lack of health insurance still threaten the health of the overall Asian American community.

Without high-quality and detailed data, how can we adequately address the needs of these growing ethnic communities? Unless we have detailed data, the Asian American and Pacific Islander community will truly be that “model minority” who waits silently and politely in the corner while so many in their own community continue to be disenfranchised from the American Dream.

As an immigrant myself and a practicing attorney in the State of Connecticut, therefore, a model minority, I strongly believe that objective detailed data can drive policy decisions that allows every member of the Asian American and Pacific Islander community to thrive.

I thank the Education Committee members for their time and attention and respectfully request that you do not support R.S.B. 359.