Testimony before the Appropriations Committee  
March 8, 2018  

Education Committee

*S.B. No. 359 (RAISED) AN ACT PROHIBITING THE DISAGGREGATION OF STUDENT DATA BY ETHNIC SUBGROUPS IN THE PUBLICSCHOOL INFORMATION SYSTEM.

Good Morning Senators Slossberg and Boucher, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee.

My name is Velandy Manohar, MD and I am a registered voter living in Haddam. I am unable to present my testimony in person, but I am determined to make my testimony against SB 359 known to all of you. There are at least these three reasons:

1. SB 359 responds to irrational fears and divisive sentiments
2. SB 359 creates barriers to educational success for our students
3. SB 359 prohibits our right to determine how collected data is aggregated

I am a first-generation South Asian Immigrant from India. The Indian immigrant community with God’s grace have done well in the United States of America. However, many other immigrant families especially from South East Asia where Genocide and protracted War caused severe trauma, social, education and economic devastation who are not so lucky. Therefore, ignoring the healthcare concerns and trauma of ethnic communities who are trying to keep their heads above water amid strong anti-immigrant head winds does a disservice to our educational system which can be the foundation for launching a prosperous and healthy future for the children and grandchildren of first generation immigrants especially immigrants from lands ravaged by war.

SB 359 responds to irrational fears and divisive classist sentiments rather than addressing the needs and differences of ethnic subpopulations, which are masked by aggregated data. As a refugee, I can understand privacy concerns in a political climate that doesn’t seem to welcome immigrants. I can also appreciate concerns that disaggregated data about Asian Americans could lead to more splits within this community due to inevitable comparisons about socioeconomic status between ethnic groups. However, this bill is a misguided response to a concern that does not represent the beliefs, values, or needs of the Asian diaspora.

The most vocal supporters of SB 359 argue that the collected data will disfavor their children in elite college admissions processes. But discrimination and quotas of any kind in college admissions are prohibited by the 14th Amendment, and strict scrutiny is used to review discriminatory intent. **There is a big difference between collecting data to discriminate, which is unconstitutional, and the public policy aims of disaggregating data to understand how to empower all students to succeed.**

Moreover, SB 359 creates barriers to educational success for our students. In the last few years, doing the healthcare reform advocacy work that I do on a grassroots level, I have learned that we need data disaggregation to offer targeted supports instead of squandering our state’s resources on overly
inclusive and culturally insensitive measures. In this budget crisis, we need to identify specifically where valuable state dollars need to go to address educational and health care disparities, such as achievement gaps in education and overutilizers of the emergency rooms. Lack of culturally appropriate and targeted interventions in education and in healthcare can impact children’s ability to succeed in schools.

Finally, our community has a property right to our own data, and we should be allowed to have some say in how it’s aggregated. This bill prohibits our right to determine how collected data is aggregated. My profession requires me to review and evaluate state funded programs with community input. We need disaggregated data to do our work effectively. We need to distinguish between the needs of the many unique groups in the Asian population to effectively address each community’s concerns.

Let’s protect all minorities in CT from discrimination, and let’s also ensure that if we are collecting race data in the state, we continue to promote data disaggregation to help those that need it most. To do this, we must support rather than prohibit data disaggregation.