Testimony before the Education Committee
Opposing S.B. 359 Prohibiting the Disaggregation of Student Data by Ethnic Subgroups
Testimony by Vonnie May
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Good morning. My name is Vonnie May, and I am a Community Health Worker. I am myself a refugee from Cambodia, coming to the United States when I was 15 years old. I work every day with Cambodian refugees. I also work with their children, and now their grandchildren.

I oppose Senate Bill 359. I feel that it is very important for the public schools to keep track of the progress of each student. Sometimes that means you have to know their ethnic backgrounds. That data could tell us about the unique problems that a certain subgroup might have. For example, as a Cambodian refugee, I struggled very hard in school. English was not my first language, and there were few resources to help me learn. It was too expensive for me to go to college. Refugee children also often live in poverty, and they have experienced trauma. Many of the challenges that I had in school, and in growing up here in the United States, were related to my background as a Cambodian refugee.

If my school had data on the educational problems that others like me were experiencing, they might have recognized that as a group we were struggling. Data may seem like an abstract thing, but it would have told my teachers and school administrators that a young woman from Cambodia was having difficulties----it might also have told them that other young people from Cambodia were having similar problems. Then those problems could have been identified and addressed by the school.

Without data on students’ race, ethnicity, and language, we are unable to solve the problems of smaller subgroups like mine that are swallowed up in large ethnic categories like “Asian.” For that reasons, I oppose Senate Bill 359. Rather I would encourage the public schools in Connecticut to collect more data on all subgroups so that their educations would be better protected.

Thank you for your attention.

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