Testimony before the Education Committee
Opposing S.B. 359 Prohibiting the Disaggregation of Student Data by Ethnic Subgroups
Testimony by Howard Phengsomphone
Executive Board Director of the Lao Association of Connecticut, Inc.
Thursday, March 8, 2018

Good morning, Members of the Education Committee. My name is Howard Phengsomphone. I am the Executive Board Director of the Lao Association of Connecticut. Our association was from in 1989 to serve the Lao American people who are working and living in the State of Connecticut.

I would like to add my voice in opposition to Senate Bill 359. Many Lao children suffer from educational challenges in our state’s public schools. Recent statistics show that about a third of Lao children do not graduate from high school, and only about 13% of Lao people get college degrees. (Southeast Asian Americans at a Glance, SEARAC 2011). These educational outcomes are very troublesome for members of our communities. We worry about our Lao children in the public schools.

But without data on smaller subgroups like the Lao, the public schools in Connecticut will be unable to detect problems for the Lao, such as our very high drop-out rates, or failure to plan for and attend college. When data is collected under one large category such as “Asians,” the problems of smaller groups like the Lao remain unseen. Everyone thinks all “Asians” are doing well in school, when in fact the disaggregated data shows that they are not. The same is true for other smaller subgroups existing under large race and ethnicity categories, such as Hispanics or African Americans.

When the public schools don’t know about the problems that refugee and recent immigrant children experience, there is no motivation to solve those problems. Policies will not be developed to address the educational issues of refugee children. We need to collect more refined data on all subgroups—in the Asian communities, but also in other small subgroups as well. Having less data would represent a hardship for these communities.

We need more data, not less data, on small subgroups. The future educational outcomes of the children of recent immigrants and refugees is at stake. For these reasons, I oppose Senate Bill 359.

Thank you for your consideration.

Howard Phengsomphone
Executive Board Director
Lao Association of Connecticut, Inc.
PO Box 330513 West
Hartford, CT. 06113