Dear Members of the Education Committee:

My name is Cathy Schlund-Vials and I am a voter who lives in Willimantic, Connecticut. I am submitting this testimony to oppose SB 359, which prevents the public school information system from disaggregating student data by ethnic subgroups. The ability to look at data in subgroups by race and ethnicity is critical to being able to track outcomes and target interventions to improve negative outcomes. Data provides us the information we need to make informed decisions and can improve and change lives.

As the current president of the Association for Asian American Studies, as a full professor of English and Asian/Asian American Studies (at UConn), as the director of the Asian and Asian American Studies Institute (also at UConn), and as a mixed race Cambodian American, I am in a very unique position to discuss why disaggregated data for Asian Pacific Islander Americans matters at the national, state, and local levels.

The Association for Asian American Studies was, as its mission/vision statement maintains, “founded in 1979 for the purpose of advancing the highest professional standard of excellence in teaching and research in the field of Asian American Studies; promoting better understanding and closer ties between and among various sub-components within Asian American Studies: Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, Hawaiian, Southeast Asian, South Asian, Pacific Islander, and other groups. AAAS sponsors professional activities to facilitate increased communication and scholarly exchange among teachers, researchers, and students in the field of Asian American Studies. The organization advocates and represents the interests and welfare of Asian American Studies and Asian Americans. AAAS is also founded for the purpose of educating American society about the history and aspirations of Asian American ethnic minorities.” Disaggregating the data for Asian American and Pacific Islander communities fulfills these aspirational goals; even more important and urgent, such disaggregation would allow for us as scholars, teachers, and practitioners to advocate effectively for our respective communities, which are marked by very different histories, socioeconomic dynamics, and issues. Such heterogeneity is evident in the fact that our communities are comprised of refugees, immigrants, native-born and naturalized citizens, and individuals from diverse socioeconomic strata and backgrounds.

And, it is apparent at the University of Connecticut. As a first-generation college student, I know firsthand challenges posed by refugee/immigrant status and socioeconomic disparities. The inability to distinguish the experiences of a Cambodian refugee who has sought asylum from the murderous Khmer Rouge regime and those of a second-generation Japanese American medical doctor is irrational, irresponsible, and disastrous. The proposed policy is also dangerous, for it obscures the linguistic diversity of the state’s Asian American residents. This knowledge is necessary for meeting the healthcare and legal needs of a large, varied, and variegated community.

Please oppose SB 359 and ensure that every child has an equal access to quality education. Thank you for your time and consideration.