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 PUBLIC SCHOOL INFORMATION SYSTEM.

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

My name is Quyen Truong and I am a registered voter living in Hartford. I am here to speak against SB 359 for 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 Vietnamese American refugee. My father fought in the Vietnam War and was sent to seven years in re-education camps as punishment. Our family faces trauma particular to the Vietnamese refugee community. My family struggled to survive in the United States, and we are lucky to be where we are today. However, many other refugee families are not so lucky, and ignoring the healthcare concerns and trauma of ethnic communities does a disservice to our educational system.

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 aim 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 in order to effectively address each community’s concerns.

Let’s protect all minorities in CT from discrimination, and let’s also ensure that as long as 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.