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Testimony of Rita Wang
Member, Yale Asian American Studies Task Force
204 York Street, I-121
New Haven, CT 06511

In opposition: R.S.B. 359
An Act Prohibiting the Disaggregation of Student Data by Ethnic Subgroups in the Public School Information System.

My name is Rita Wang. I am an Asian American social science student at Yale University, and I am writing this testimony in opposition to RSB 359. As a social scientist who attempts to understand relationships of race and poverty through data collection, races are not a monolith. Allowing educational institutions to collect ethnic subgroup data would shed light on which groups need more resources. In general, policy makers, advocates, and our own community members do not know enough about those most vulnerable within our own communities because detailed data is not regularly collected.

As a social scientist, I collect data in order to understand how different communities are being affected by poverty, crime, gerrymandering, etc. However, I struggle to find data that doesn’t aggregate Asian Americans. In order to more accurately understand how certain education policies would affect Asian American communities, disaggregated data is necessary. I know that data disaggregation will simply allow for policymakers and social scientists to identify communities more at need. No individual identification will be included in the data. If individuals are uncomfortable, they can simply opt out of answering the survey, and their ethnicity would not be collected.

Additionally, data disaggregation would allow for individuals to self identify as a certain ethnicity or race. My last name is Wang, and thus anyone who sees this will assume I am Chinese American. They may be correct on this case, but these guesses are not always correct. Preventing data disaggregation would simply encourage more stereotyping by data scientists who are trying to clean or disaggregate data. There are members of our community who do not “look” or “act” Asian American or a certain ethnicity, and there are members who “look” a certain ethnicity but are not. Collecting disaggregated data would allow for once invisible communities to become visible. It also helps social scientists because they do not need make wild stereotyped guesses about data when they clean data.
Third, I believe that most of the worries that produced this bill are largely unfounded. I was raised in an extremely wealthy Asian American town in Edison, New Jersey. And, I teach high school students at Southern Connecticut Chinese School about Chinese Immigration history. Those I know who support the bill support it because they are afraid data disaggregation will harm them when they apply to college or private high school. Regardless of whether or not affirmative action harms Asian Americans, public school systems attempting to understand the diverse experiences of their students have no relation to whether a student is accepted into a private institution.

Fourth, as a scholar of immigration, I understand that immigrant communities are afraid of being recognized as the other. Historically, the United States has incarcerated Japanese Americans, and denaturalized all Chinese Americans through the Chinese Exclusion Act. However, as I have mentioned before, public data does not include identifying information. Thus, disaggregation of data also does not constitute segregation or an “Asian Registry.” Sometimes, communities are predominantly of a certain ethnicity, due to refugee resettlements or family based immigration. This bill prevents the recognizing of the diversity of communities that already exist, but are largely invisible to policymakers and data scientists.

Our Connecticut community must strive to best represent and better serve the needs of our less-visible community members. Government policies that instruct public agencies to capture more nuanced data are beneficial to all.

Thank you for taking the time to include my testimony into this hearing. I strongly urge to you vote against RSB 359.

Kindest,
Rita Wang