March 7, 2018

Dear Members of the Education Committee:

My name is Miriam Yeung and I am a voter living in the town of Farmington, CT. 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 provide support services where the need exists. Data provides us the information we need to make informed decisions and it can improve and change lives.

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are the most diverse of the ethnic groups, more than 17 members of nearly 50 different races and ethnicities (Washington Center for Equitable Growth, 2016). Unpacking Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders by detailed ethnicity or region of national origin yields at least four groups of Asians: East Asian, Southeast Asian, South Asian and Asian. The rosy narrative that all the members of this group are relatively homogeneous and successful (or more stereotypically, the ‘model minority’) puts many of these communities, such as Hmong Americans, at substantial risk of being underserved by their local, state, and federal governments.

Hmong Americans are less likely than the average American to have a household income over $50,000, be employed, or be a college graduate. But the livelihoods of these families, which originally hailed from Southeast Asia and mostly migrated to the United States at the end of the Vietnam War, get lost in the data provided by local, state and federal agencies. Disaggregating student data by ethnic subgroup would expose the disparities among Asian Americans in such areas as education and healthcare.

The language in SB 359 would limit our state’s ability to disaggregate data to two conditions: 1) if it is federally mandated or 2) if the data is uniformly collected for all ethnic subgroups for all students in the state. Connecticut should have the choice to disaggregate data in a manner that makes sense for our unique needs. SB 359’s first condition subjects our state choice to federal mandates. SB 359’s second condition creates an impossible standard and thus prohibits disaggregating data, since data is currently not collected from all students in the state (i.e. home schooled and private school students). Our state has a right to our own collected data, and we should retain a choice in how it is aggregated. These limits remove Connecticut’s ability to choose how to aggregate our community data.

The support for this bill comes from individuals who believe disaggregated data would impact the educational career of their children, specifically, in college admissions. Today, students’ educational careers are impacted because we are not paying close enough attention to the needs of students who are invisible in generalized or aggregated race and ethnic data. Lifting the veil on this data, while maintaining the privacy of individuals, would help us all begin to see the disparities and aid us in ensuring each child has a chance to succeed.
The United States is a land of opportunity and regardless of race, ethnicity, or primary language, our students should have the resources necessary to succeed. Disaggregated data will allow us the opportunity to better see where needs are, so resources are targeted properly to give equitable tools for success to all our students.

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

Sincerely,

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