



CALIFORNIA COMMISSION ON ASIAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER AMERICAN AFFAIRS

Chairperson

Phong La,
Alameda

February 24, 2015

The Honorable Jose Medina
Chair, Higher Assembly Education Committee
Room 173, Legislative Office Building
Sacramento, CA 95814

Vice Chair

Dianne
Yamashiro-Omi,
Alameda

Sent via e-mail

Secretary

Rajan Gill,
Yuba City

RE: AB 176 (Bonta) AHEAD Act

Treasurer

Jeffrey S. Kim,
Los Angeles

Dear Assembly Member Medina:

Commissioners

Judy Ki,
San Diego

On behalf of The California Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander American Affairs (CAPIAA), I am writing to express my organization's strong support for data disaggregation for Asian and Pacific Islander Americans and for AB 176 (Bonta), the Accounting for Health and Education in API Demographics Act (AHEAD Act).

EunSook Lee,
Torrance

Steven Ma,
Cupertino

Catherine 'Ofa
Mann,
Sacramento

The AHEAD Act will require the State Department of Public Health and the higher education institution administrations of the California Community Colleges, California State University, and the University of California that directly collect demographic data to disaggregate different ethnic origins and make data publicly available for specified Asian and Pacific Islander American (APIA) subpopulations that include but are not limited to Asian Indian, Bangladeshi, Cambodian, Chinese, Filipino, Hmong, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Laotian, Malaysian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Taiwanese, Thai, Vietnamese, Fijian, Guamanian, Hawaiian, Samoan, and Tongan.

Karthick
Ramakrishnan,
Riverside

Tamiko Wong,
San Bruno

Chiem-Seng
Yaangh,
Sacramento

Cirian
Villavicencio,
Elk Grove

MaiKa Yang,
Fresno

CAPIAA also recommends adding additional groups such as "Iu Mien" a notable Southeast Asian population in California, to be included in the AHEAD Act. In addition, CAPIAA strongly supports the increased access to data collected that is made publicly available, except for personal identifying information, in a report posted on the specified agencies' website and updated annually. Data to be collected will include but not limited to enrollment and graduation rates, disease rates, health insurance coverage, birth and death rates.

Data disaggregation within the APIA communities is imperative for uncovering the health, social, economic, and educational disparities inherent not only in but in all ethnic populations. Between the 1970s and 1990s thousands of Southeast Asian families fled their war-torn countries after the end of the Vietnam War and sought asylum as refugees through family reunification programs in cities throughout California and across the nation. Although they have a significantly shorter history in California and continue to experience difficulty navigating the different systems, many of the children of these refugees continue to pursue higher education with the dream to become contributing citizens to our great state.

The importance of disaggregating data is exemplified by the ongoing challenges faced by Pacific Islander and Southeast Asian American students. Often categorized as "Asian" their lower academic achievement rates are overshadowed by the Model Minority stereotype that all Asian students excel in academics. However, these students face such challenges as limited English proficiency, high rates of poverty, cultural and linguistic barriers that hinders their access to educational resources. For example, the 2010 American Community Survey reported that 38.4% of Laotian, 39.2% of Cambodian, 37.6% of Hmong, and 51.5% of Vietnamese Americans speak English less than "very well." These students are then categorized and must assume false representations of their true experiences.

Additional findings from "The Academic Challenges of Southeast Asians at Fresno State," authored by Gong, Kubo, and Takahashi (2013), revealed staggering educational disparities of APIA and Southeast Asian students on the California State University, Fresno campus. APIA students at Fresno State fell behind their white and Hispanic peers as well as their APIA counterparts at other CSU campuses in overall retention and graduation rates. When data was disaggregated for respective APIA ethnic groups, it revealed that 97% of Hmong students were not only first-generation college students but also came from larger households (6.8 on average) and 62% were from lower income households (combined incomes of less than \$24,000/year).

Disaggregating data collected and made accessible to the public has the power to reveal the real and lived experiences and adversities of many APIA subpopulations and can aid in establishing the scope of the health and educational disparities making vulnerable groups more visible to the legislature. AB 176 will not only provide policymakers a better understanding of the breadth of diversity within our great state but can also better inform health and educational institutions to develop targeted programs and services that successfully addresses the health and education disparities among APIA subpopulations.

With your leadership to help pass AB 176 AHEAD Act, this legislation represents a historic opportunity to set an example for the rest of the nation in data disaggregation and help APIA subpopulations across our state to succeed in higher education and live healthy. In solidarity with the California Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander American Affairs, I urge you to pass AB 176.

If you should have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at 510-504-2882 and phongla@gmail.com.

Sincerely,



Phong H. La
Chairperson