



House Committee on Education

February 3, 2020

Re: HB 4160

Chair Doherty, Vice-Chair Alonso Leon, Vice-Chair Helt, and members of the committee:
On behalf of the Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon (APANO), I am writing to express our strong support for House Bill 4160, which would establish a task force to support the success of underrepresented students in postsecondary education. We note the need for this bill to specifically identify and consider different ethnic and racial groups who are underrepresented in this system, including Asian Americans and Pacific Islander (AAPI) students.

APANO works to unite Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders for social change and racial justice, including education justice. To achieve equity, we must begin by acknowledging the significant diversity, including the disparities, among AAPI communities. We know that despite broad aspirations for higher education, inequities are stopping many AAPI students from achieving these goals. However, limited data collection prevents us from capturing the range of AAPI educational experiences. We urgently need better data that disaggregates these communities. While the educational system may be working well for some Asian American students, it is falling short for others. When these various experiences are better captured, we can more effectively identify barriers and solutions.

Right now, we do know that Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (NHPI) students have some of the lowest access to postsecondary education. Oregon's NHPI students have lower college-going rates than white students and experience lower-than-average college retention and completion rates.¹

National disaggregated data demonstrates that Southeast Asian American students, including those from Hmong, Cambodian, and Vietnamese communities, face significant disparities in accessing higher education. Students who speak English with less proficiency, experience poverty, or are the first in their families to attend college have reduced access to the resources they need to enroll in and graduate from postsecondary institutions.²

¹ Higher Education Coordinating Commission, Issue Brief: Racial/Ethnic Equity in Postsecondary Education and Training, Dec.2019.

² SEARAC, Increase Access to Higher Education—Why Are Southeast Asian Students Not Going to College?, Feb. 2013.



The proposed task force presents an opportunity to look beyond the “model minority” myth that says all Asian Americans attain high levels of education. And even among Oregon’s Asian American students in aggregate, more than half of them are unable to meet their total projected expenses (relative to 42 percent of the general student population), even after including financial aid in this calculation.

In assessing barriers, the task force must be mindful to avoid a deficit mentality and focus on the strengths of AAPI students so we can identify the best ways to remove barriers to success. For example, families value higher education, but parents and their students who are the first in their families to consider college frequently lack the resources and information they need to navigate this system. By building greater supports for families and students, we can help them fulfill these dreams.

Acknowledging the importance of community and culture is another strength that we can leverage to support students, particularly in institutions with small populations of NHPI and Southeast Asian students. Commitment to care, family, and community is also an opportunity. Many AAPI students are responsible for helping provide financial support to their families or have caretaking responsibilities, making affording postsecondary education challenging. We can support their success by making sure that students have the ability to invest in their careers and better support their loved ones.

Potential solutions include stronger supports during the transition from high school to postsecondary education; creating greater community and cultural opportunities that support students’ path to graduation; and increasing college affordability. By conducting a deeper analysis, the task force members can help bring barriers impacting different Asian and Pacific Islander communities to light and develop effective solutions.

APANO knows from our work with youth that college outreach and mentoring, tutoring and support services can help them continue their education after high school. Students recognize what they need to succeed, and this task force is an opportunity to listen, collect qualitative information, and develop strategies that will set all students up for success. We respectfully urge you to include specific communities of underrepresented students in this bill and support its passage, so that we can support Oregon’s Asian American and Pacific Islander students in achieving their educational goals.

Thank you,

Jenny Lee
Advocacy Director, APANO