



**THE NATIONAL PACIFIC ISLANDER EDUCATOR NETWORK**  
4425 Pixie Ave. Lakewood, CA 90712 (562) 496-2319

September 3, 2011

**RE: Support for Assembly Bill (AB) 1088– Data to Reflect the Diversity of Asian Americans as well as Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders**

Dear Members of the Senate and Assembly,

On behalf of the National Pacific Islander Educator Network (NPIEN), I am writing to express our strong support for AB 1088, which will disaggregate data for Asian Americans (AAs), as well as Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islander (NHOPI) ethnic groups, in order to identify the unique needs of this diverse community. Our organization’s mission is to improve the higher educational opportunities for Pacific Islander students. The needs of Pacific Islanders are often rendered invisible, due to a lack of disaggregated data related to Pacific Islanders. This fact was supported in a recent article by Esther Cepeda, a writer for the Washington Post, who discussed the notion of the “Model Minority.” Although established Asian Americans may appear to be progressing well academically, Southeast Asians and Pacific Islanders, when lumped with other Asian Americans, became an invisible statistic since everyone “seems to be doing well.”

AB 1088 requires the Department of Industrial Relations (DIR) and the Department of Fair Employment and Housing (DFEH), in the course of collecting demographic data, to collect and disaggregate data for the Asian American, as well as Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander ethnic categories currently reported in the U.S. Census. These categories include: Bangladeshi, Fijian, Hmong, Indonesian, Malaysian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Taiwanese, Thai and Tongan. In addition, it would ensure transparency and accountability by requiring the two departments to make this information available to the public by posting it on their website.

Disaggregating the data for AA and NHOPI enables policy-makers to understand the true experiences of all our communities, as it relates to education. Until the 2000 Census, data on Pacific Islander education was largely unavailable. The 2010 study, *State of Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Education*, chaired by Assemblymember Mike Eng, concludes the following:

- One fifth of Pacific Islander students drop-out from high school
- One fifth of Fijians have earned a high school diploma
- Eleven percent of Pacific Islanders are limited English proficient
- On fifth of Tongans live in poverty, which contributes to a decrease in higher educational attainment
- Only one out of ten Pacific Islanders complete a college degree, yet disaggregated data does not yet exist to support this

One of NPIEN's successful outreach programs is a guest speaker/mentoring program, where professionals from our community address and motivate students. This year, our speakers included Dr. Keith Camacho, one of only two PI professors in the UC System, Mahonri Sapiga, one of only two social workers in Southern California, and Dr. Mafutaga Tagaloa Tulifau, one of the only female physicians in our community. We need your support to assist our students in attaining a higher education, or we will continue to be underrepresented in many fields.

We are pleased to support AB 1088 because it will provide accurate demographic data, which is critical in developing effective policies, strategies, and programs that respond to the needs of California's increasingly growing AA and NHOPI populations.

Sincerely,

*Victor C. Thompson*

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Executive Director

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