October 15, 2019

The Honorable Mark R. Pacheco, Senate Chair

The Honorable Danielle W. Gregoire, House Chair

Joint Committee on State Administration and Regulatory Oversight

Massachusetts State House

Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chairman Pacheco and Chairwoman Gregoire,

I appreciate the consideration of the Joint Committee on State Administration and Regulatory Oversight of **House Bill 2681, An Act ensuring equitable representation in the Commonwealth.** I am a co-sponsor of this bill and urge the Committee to support the favorable passage of this legislation.

This legislation would require standardized collection and reporting of race and ethnicity data by state agencies that collect demographic data to improve government and community services while protecting the privacy of Massachusetts residents.

With increasing diversity in the Commonwealth, it is important to accurately document, measure and report data that informs public efforts to address social, economic, or educational inequalities which persist but may be invisible in data analyzed only through broad racial categories.

Equitable representation in population data ensures that everybody is seen, heard, counted, and accommodated. We need to ensure that our state agencies, which already collect optional demographic data based on race, also provide ethnic subgroup breakdowns to ensure full visibility, representation, and inclusion for under-served and under-represented groups.

This bill is of particular importance for my district. My hometown of Lowell is home to the second largest Cambodian American population in the United States. Aggregated data by race only does not accurately represent the situation that these families face. The combined Asian American family poverty rate in Massachusetts was found to be 8.4 percent, whereas disaggregated data specified poverty rates of 16.7 percent of Cambodian families. Educational attainment among Asian American subgroups varies greatly—57.5 percent of Asian Americans in Massachusetts have a Bachelor’s or higher, but this is true for only 14.9 percent of Cambodian Americans.

As these data points show, “Asians” as an all-encompassing label fails to reflect the wide disparities among ethnic subgroups. That is why the Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association of Greater Lowell is among a group of over 50 multicultural organizations that support this data equity legislation.

This year’s bill is an improvement over prior years’ proposals because it includes data disaggregation for ethnic backgrounds from all racial categories. This data would allow for more effective implementation of multilingual services and materials from service agencies, service programs targeting specific at-risk communities, bilingual public school notices and insight on communities whose students need more support to succeed, and support for community-based health care and insight on health disparities affecting specific groups

For these reasons, I respectfully request that this legislation receive a favorable report from your Committee. Thank you for your time and your consideration of this matter. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at (617) 722-1630.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Kennedy
State Senator
First Middlesex District