



## Southeast Asia Resource Action Center

### PRESS RELEASE

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### **SENATE INTRODUCES BILL SUPPORTING ASIAN AMERICAN PACIFIC ISLANDER STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Washington, D.C. – Today, U.S. Senator Barbara Boxer (CA) and U.S. Senator Daniel K. Akaka (HI) introduced a U.S. Senate legislation known as Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Serving Institutions Act. If enacted this legislation would establish a federal designation for institutions of higher education serving AAPIs. H.R. 2616 serves as the companion bill in the U.S. House of Representative, which was introduced by Congressman David Wu (OR) back in May 2005.

The legislation provides the U.S. Department of Education with the authority to issue grants of assistance to higher education institutions that have at least 10% AAPI and whereas a significant percentage of students in the institution are low-income. Under current law, the U.S. Department of Education is authorized to issue grants and assistance to Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic Serving Institutions, Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities, and Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian Serving Institutions. Currently, higher education institutions that serve a large population of AAPIs are the only entities that do not have a federal designation. This bill seeks equity by providing increased higher education opportunities for low-income and underserved AAPI students.

“Contrary to the model minority myth, AAPIs, especially Southeast Asian students continue to face barriers in accessing higher education. When we disaggregate the data, according to the U.S. Census, it is evident that only 11% of Cambodians, 9% of Laotians, and 20% of Vietnamese, over the age of 25 attained a bachelor’s degree or higher as compared to 28% of the total population,” said Doua Thor, Executive Director of SEARAC. “This legislation is the beginning of acknowledging that educational disparities exist in the AAPI community, and there is a need to take action.”

Significantly, this legislation provides an incentive for higher education institutions to partner with AAPI community based organizations, and would result in strengthening the infrastructure for federal agencies to address the AAPI community needs and disaggregating data on AAPIs.

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