

Testimony in support of House Bill 2113: A Bill to Create an Advisory Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Affairs

Submitted by:  
Srividya Dasaraju  
2217 SW Pondview Dr  
Topeka, KS 66614

Good morning, members of the committee. My name is Srividya Dasaraju, and I am a foreign policy analyst for the federal government and a political science researcher. I have been involved in political campaigns, political advocacy, and student political organizing since I was a young adult growing up in Topeka, Kansas. I am submitting this testimony in support of House Bill 2113 to create an Advisory Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Affairs, or AAPI Affairs. An AAPI Commission would have many benefits but, in particular, I would like to speak to how it would impact civic and political engagement, especially among young Asian Americans.

As a researcher, I have closely studied Asian American politics in the United States. I would like to begin by highlighting recent political science research that underscores the importance of creating this commission now. According to U.S. Census Data, the number of US residents who identify as Asian Americans have nearly tripled over the past 30 years, and Asian Americans are now the fastest-growing of the nation's four largest ethnic groups. In Kansas, AAPIs are the third-largest minority group. This population growth has also translated into an appetite for engagement. US Census data also found that the AAPI voting turnout rate has grown by 10% between the 2016 and 2020 elections, and they are expected to make up one-tenth of all voters by 2044. In 2021, post-election polls found that despite lower levels of contact from political campaigns, young Asian Americans mobilized at a historically high level. Simply put, a new generation of Asian Americans are coming of political age, and we want to continue to be engaged in our local and state communities, but there are currently few forums that facilitate the inclusion of AAPIs in our policy-making processes. As outlined by Representative Xu, due to the litany of pressing issues facing the community, there is no better time for this advisory commission to be put in place.

A Commission on AAPI affairs would create tangible benefits not only for the AAPI community but also for our state's policy-making process. First, an AAPI commission would catalyze young Asian Americans in Kansas to be more civically and politically invested. The creation of this commission would signal to the growing AAPI population across the state that their voices are being heard by state and local governments and provide mechanisms for engagement. For instance, community outreach, service projects, and public awareness campaigns create avenues for young AAPIs to get involved in their communities, start dialogues with public officials, and begin bridging the gap between the AAPI community and our public institutions. More specifically, this commission also can address long-standing barriers to Asian American civic engagement. Though research has indicated that the Asian American population has become more mobilized in recent years, there are still significant gaps in democratic participation that can be addressed through such a commission. AAPIs reported lower outreach rates from political candidates and government officials as compared to other populations, and cultural and linguistic

barriers have been identified as leading causes of lower levels of civic engagement. Addressing these issues are critical to creating a Kansas that is equitable and responsive to its populations and the instatement of this commission provides an opportunity to do so.

Second, commissions are unmatched in their ability to connect decision-makers with constituents, leading to better policy-making across the board. AAPI commissions serve as conduits for understanding a particular community's needs by facilitating direct conversations between government, non-profit organizations, and the Asian American community. In particular, this communication is vital to helping the AAPI population because though it is a diverse population—ethnically, politically, and socioeconomically—more often than not, it is treated as a monolith by policymakers. This commission has the ability to disentangle the particular needs of various AAPI communities, and as a result design more tailored policies, programs, and research to address them. Other states' AAPI commissions have been successful in increasing voter registration, establishing policies to prevent hate crimes, advocating for cultural diversity and awareness, and making economic resources more readily accessible. Kansas should follow suit.

I am hopeful that when Kansas implements a Commission on AAPI Affairs, other Asian-American Kansans, like me, will know where to turn when they want to have their ideas and voices heard. Representative Xu, I thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I would like to thank the committee for its time. I yield for any questions.