

WASHINGTON, DC – Yesterday, Congressman Bobby Scott questioned the Department of Justice on barriers to voting for Asian American voters, including issues of language access and unauthorized requests for voter identification. Rep. Scott directed questions to Asheesh Agarwal, Deputy Assistant Attorney General at the U. S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, at a voter suppression hearing held by the Judiciary Committees Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties.

Rep. Scott, Chair of the Civil Rights Taskforce of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC) and member of the Judiciary Subcommittee, highlighted a recent study conducted by the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF). The report documented barriers to voting for Asian Americans in nine states and the District of Columbia during the 2006 elections. Problems include mistranslated voting materials and inadequate interpreters, hostile poll workers, and improper or excessive demands for voter identification.

"Access to voting remains a significant barrier to Asian American voters, particularly for language minorities and first-time voters," said Rep. Scott. "These communities must be included in the discussion when Congress examines civil rights in the voting context."

Rep. Mike Honda, CAPACs Chair, agreed wholeheartedly with Rep. Scott. Honda has made voting rights a CAPAC priority for the past two congresses. "Voting is one of the most treasured civil rights in our history, and we must protect the right to vote for all citizens, regardless of ethnicity, English proficiency, or how recently theyve arrived on our shores," said Honda.

Deputy Assistant Attorney General Asheesh Agarwal testified that the Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, if the studys findings were sustained, "would absolutely take a look at bringing a lawsuit under Section 2 and/or Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act. Weve done so in many instances already." Mr. Agarwal mentioned that the Civil Rights Division is reviewing the allegations of the report.

Hilary Shelton, Director of the NAACP's Washington Bureau, also agreed with Scott. He also highlighted the fact that these types of cases were a major problem throughout the South as well as throughout the West.

"I applaud the Judiciary Committee for shedding light on these important barriers for the Asian American community," said Honda. "I am thankful to Rep. Bobby Scott for his continued leadership and advocacy in strengthening civil rights for all Americans."

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The Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC) is a bicameral and bipartisan caucus of Members of Congress of Asian and Pacific Islander descent and Members who have a strong dedication to promoting the well-being of the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community. Founded in 1994 by then Congressman Norman Mineta, and currently chaired by Congressman Michael Honda, CAPAC has been addressing the needs of the AAPI community in all areas of American life. For more information on CAPAC, please call (202) 225-2631 or visit <http://www.honda.house.gov/capac>.