



Testimony  
Before the Legislative Working Group on Economic Disparities  
January 15, 2016  
3:00 pm

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Mr. Chair and members of the Working Group, thank you for having me here this afternoon. My name is Sia Her. I am the Executive Director of the Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans.

The Council is a state agency created by the Legislature to assist state government in ensuring that the realities of Asian Pacific Minnesotans are understood and considered in public policy decisions.

Minnesota's Asian Pacific Minnesotan community is extremely diverse and unique from those in our other 49 states. Our community members hail from more than 40 nations. Some came to Minnesota because of decades of war and political persecution in their native countries; others came seeking educational and economic opportunities. Some came with nothing but memories of dead bodies floating down rivers; others came with degrees in engineering and medicine. In this state and across the nation, the Asian Pacific community is the fastest growing ethnic group.

*I understand that last week, the state demographer, Dr. Susan Brower, presented to this committee data on Minnesota's cultural populations and then offered an interpretation of the relevance of this data to the future of our state. I also understand that Senator Champion has assembled a number of ideas related to how we can begin to address disparities for Black Minnesotans. Our office commends the leadership of our Legislature and Governor for your dedication to advancing equity in Minnesota.*

I am here today with a simple message: Minnesota is diverse. Our neighborhoods are diverse. Our communities with high poverty are very diverse. An accurate understanding of the concentration of poverty in our neighborhoods has to reflect this fact. The national narrative of the model minority is a myth for many in our Asian Pacific Minnesotan community. Our largest ethnic group, the Hmong, and our new refugee communities, such as the Karen and the Bhutanese, experience disparities in jobs, health, education, housing, and income. These communities are also concentrated in our most challenged neighborhoods. While some of our communities do indeed fit the definition of the so-called model minority, such as the Asian Indian community with a median household income of \$89,000, many of our communities are on the wrong side of disparities gap; their median household incomes are significantly less than that of the white household.

We should keep these facts in mind as we consider grants and policies – let us not pit groups against each other, or pick winners or losers. Our neighborhoods with concentrations of poverty are not homogenous. For any economic development program to be successful, it must target all residents of our most challenged neighborhoods. Let us proceed thoughtfully and with a focus on the underlying issues for all Minnesotans of color.

As the agency representing all Asian Pacific Minnesotans, our Council reminds all of you that our community is a community of great diversity – the model minority narrative is but a myth for the majority of us.

As you proceed with creating public policies for all Minnesotans, our Council asks that you keep in mind the diversity of the communities that make up our state of Minnesota. For Asian Pacific Minnesotans,



we believe that when the Legislature addresses economic and other disparities, it should remember that “AND” is the operative phrase.

As the chief staff of the state agency created to represent and advocate on behalf of the Asian Pacific Minnesotan community, I am here to remind you to include our community in legislation designed to close disparity gaps.

Thank you for the opportunity to share with you our Council’s perspective. At this time, I am happy to answer any questions members may have.

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