Office of Ombudsperson for Families (OBFF)

Ombudsperson Board for Asian Pacific Families

Tuesday, April 15, 2025, 6:00 pm

Meeting Minutes

Minutes prepared by KH

# Present:

Ombudsperson for Asian Pacific Families Manuel B. Zuniga, Jr. (MBZ), Board Chair Brook Mallak (BM), Julie Le (JL), Derek Kuns (DK), Yi Li You (YLY), Katie Heilman (KH) taking minutes.

# Absent: none

# Minutes

1. BM brought the meeting to order at 6:01 pm once there was a quorum. BM began introductions. BM asked for a motion to accept the agenda and previous meeting’s minutes. The minutes need one typo fixed – KH will make the appropriate edit. BM moved to approve, JL seconded. The agenda was approved unanimously.
2. MBZ discussed Governor Walz’s return to office order for state employees. OBFF is in compliance since most of the staff are hybrid; it might not apply to the agency since other agencies are keeping their own policies. Agencies must be in compliance by June 1, 2025. The policy states that 50% of the days per month must be worked in office. MBZ will review his current schedule to see if any adjustments need to be made. BM asked how that policy will be enforced - MBZ was not sure how they are checking on it. MBZ sent the template announcement to the staff once it was available, so the whole agency is aware of the policy.
3. Because the OBFF is adding staff (2 new investigators), the agency needs to increase its office space. The agency is currently looking at a larger space within the same building managed by Wellington. MBZ will update the board once more is finalized. OBFF is in a good place for the budget to do this based on the budget meeting last week. The Senate has approved their budget, while House is still in flux. The agency has just had one legislative inquiry this session so far. OBFF will negotiate with Wellington to get a cut rate on a larger space. With the return to office order, more employees are moving back into the building in general.
4. Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) Heritage Month – the Federal government is not recognizing it this year for first time in 33 years. Governor Walz has indicated that the administration is willing to issue a proclamation for it in May for the state of Minnesota. The I-35W bridge will be lit up on May 4. The City of St. Paul and City of Moorhead are also issuing proclamations. MBZ is also working to have unified language with the governor’s office. BM asked what color the bridge will be – blue, red, gold, and green. Minnesota Employees of Asian Descent (MEAD) is working on the issuance of a flag commemorating the month in Minnesota. MBZ will send BM the LinkedIn post from MEAD with more information.
5. OBFF case intake process updates – Deputy Ombudsperson Beth Chaplin is working with Intake Specialist Rachel Lovejoy to move to a different case management system. The OBFF still does not have workable product with CaseIQ, so they are looking at three, possibly four other vendors. The agency will likely take Odyssey funds to make this happen. MBZ will have more details once the ombudspersons see demonstrations from the potential vendors. BM asked for clarification on what Odyssey funds are – this is leftover money from the agency’s general fund that can be assigned to MNIT projects in a future fiscal year. The agency may use Odyssey funds for upgrading IT when they move to a new office space, as well.
6. Deputy Ombudsperson Beth Chaplin is currently working on a document outlining how the new investigative process will look. The goal is to determine how the agency can fit the new case management product to obtain the data it needs, and to do policy initiatives. BM asked about language to collect demographics so the agency knows how it is doing with each community – other agencies may not collect that data accurately. The Department of Human Services (DHS) has a modernization plan for demographics collection but there are concerns about the budget slowing this process down.
7. Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) African American Well-being Unit (AAWBU) recently held a Meet and Greet – KH sent the slide deck earlier. The creation of the AAWBU is part of the implementation of the Minnesota African American Family Preservation and Child Welfare Disproportionality Act (MAAFPACWDA). There is discussion about the two pilot counties (Hennepin and Ramsey) that are rolling out the legislation, as there is still confusion on the difference between “active efforts” and “reasonable efforts” for finding kin for child placements. OBFF and the legislature are not sure how this is being implemented at this time. The AAWBU is monitoring this process and will report compliance. The board discussed the break-up of DHS into smaller agencies, which will enter its next phase in July. BM asked when AAWBU will have first report on the pilot counties – MBZ will look into this.
8. MBZ attended a workshop today for the Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare (CASCW) on how they are implementing AI in child welfare. Legislators and people from the University of Minnesota presented at the conference. Counties have purchased AI software to make the process more efficient. The upcoming SSIS modernization will be an expensive endeavor, but OBFF is determined to be part of the process.
9. CAPI is holding a summit on Monday, April 21, at the University of Minnesota – AAPI Rising: Identity, Resilience, and Leadership Summit. There was a recommendation for the board to attend. MBZ, TG, and BM are planning to attend. There is no cost to attend, and meals are provided.
10. Coalition of Asian American Leaders (CAAL) Asian Minnesotan Day at the Capitol is on April 30. Members from the Minnesota Asian Pacific Caucus will attend. The caucus is largest it’s ever been in Minnesota history.
11. JL mentioned that April 30 marks the 50th year since fall of Saigon, and on April 26 the Vietnamese community will be at the Capitol to recognize this event. MBZ asked for more information so OBFF can post on website. JL is starting a new position that may involve potential conflicts with her board participation.
12. BM asked for a motion to adjourn. JL moved with DK seconding to adjourn the meeting at 6:44 pm. The motion was approved unanimously.