



KHA

Khmer Health Advocates
Treatment and advocacy for victims of torture

February 20, 2007

To: Members of the Appropriations Committee

Bill 198

From: Theanvy Kuoch, Executive Director

In 1981, I arrived in the United States alone, as a refugee and a survivor of war, torture and genocide. 18 members of my family died during the Khmer Rouge Regime. In 1984, I founded Khmer Health Advocates with three American nurses to serve Cambodian survivors living in Connecticut. Over the years we have provided torture treatment services for more than 1500 Cambodian survivors who have stories very similar to mine.

Today, Cambodians are suffering and dying from health problems directly related to their torture experiences. Cambodians have a stroke rate 4 times that of other Americans and we are 6 times more likely to die from diabetes. A RAND research study shows that 62% of our adults have Post traumatic Stress Disorder and 51% have depression. We are suffering and dying from health problems that are treatable.

For the past 25 years, Khmer Health Advocates has provided more than \$5 million dollars of health care for Cambodians in Connecticut with no help from the state. Every year we see the situation becoming more desperate for our community. Our patients cannot access medical care because there are no interpreters. We do not have the resources to make a difference anymore

During the Khmer Rouge Regime in Cambodia we were forced to be slaves. We worked 16 hours a day at heavy labor and received less than 600 calories of food. What was equally painful was that every day we were told over and over, "To keep you is no gain; to lose you is no loss" We had no value to the Khmer Rouge and more than 2.5 million of our people died.

The health care system in Connecticut tells us that we have no value. Our community members get turned away from the clinics because a clerk cannot find our names in a data base. We cannot access medical care because we cannot explain what is wrong with us. When we do get care we worry that we get the wrong medications because we know the doctors did not understand us. We also worry that we don't know what the doctor wants us to do.

It is very painful for me to watch my people die from conditions that should not cause them to die. Every year, I believed that the situation would get better but in fact in the past 10 years, it has become much worse. Now when I have to help my patients get access to clinic care, I heard the words of the Khmer Rouge, "to keep you is no gain; to lose you is no loss."

When our society ignores the civil rights codes and lets the most vulnerable members of the state suffer and die, then the humanity of the entire society is diminished. As a survivor of genocide, I know that when a country loses its humanity, terrible things happen.

Signed,

Theanvy Kuoch