

APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING
Asian Pacific American Commission

Written testimony submitted by:

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Southeast Asians came to the United States as refugees fleeing war, torture and genocide. Our arrival was not a choice but a necessity for survival and we came with little more than the clothing on our back. Few people understand what it means to lose everything. We lost our homes, our families, our friends, the ability to work at our chosen professions and for many of us, our health. Years of torture, hunger, slave labor have compromised our physical and mental well-being. Unlike some survivors of war and genocide, we have no hope of compensation or return of our property. It should be understandable that many of us are poor and in need of special health care services.

The reality for Southeast Asians in Connecticut is that only a few will get any meaningful mental health services, let alone the specialty services for the trauma related mental health problems that afflict our survivors. A study of SEA's in Connecticut done in 2003 indicates that 44% our adult population suffers from depression and 21% from PTSD. U.S. Veterans who served in Vietnam and Iraq have PTSD rates of 15% and they too struggle to obtain care.

Southeast Asians came to Connecticut as refugees, not as beggars. We work, pay taxes and are good citizens. When we are sick and disabled we are entitled to the same care as other members of our society. For more than 30 years, we have attempted to educate state agencies about our needs with few results. Today, our community members are still not able to access state services because they don't speak English. Many cannot get through the front door of clinics because they cannot use telephone trees or because their Medicaid cards "didn't work." They cannot get free services such as mammograms because there are no interpreters or social services to assist them to understand available programs.

Connecticut needs a **Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islanders** in order to assure fair and equitable care for all members of our society. As the Executive Director and licensed family therapist working with Cambodians in the state, I urge you to support this Commission. It is important that my community has a voice – after all, this is we are no longer visitors. This is our home too.