

The Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission Requires Additional Funding to Effectively Serve the Community

My name is Sounthaly Thammavong; I live in the Greater Hartford area of Connecticut and I work at a Community College as a Retention Program Coordinator. I am a Licensed Master Level Social Worker and also serve on the board of the Asian Pacific American Coalition of Connecticut.

The Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission (APAAC) is important because they serve as the voice of Asian Pacific Americans (APA) in Connecticut. Growing up as an immigrant I never really felt that I was an American because I was often challenged when I said that I was from the Hartford area. There was the assumption that my family was well off, educated and exemplified the 'Model Minority.'

Asian American Studies courses at the University of Connecticut informed me to why people had the preconceived notions that they did. I am a foreign born Naturalized citizen. My family struggled to make ends meet and they pushed education on me, even though they did not understand the system itself. Groups like the APAAC work diligently to serve communities that often fall between the cracks. By providing funding to this group, they will work to bring education and advocacy to APAs in Connecticut.

70% of all APAs are foreign-born residents and Asians represent the majority minority in 40% of Connecticut school districts. This is a significant barrier to accessing education when groups believe that APAs are a homogenous group and do not have any resources to go to. As a Higher Education professional I see the over representation of Asian and Asian Americans in STEM disciplines with little attention to the Asian and Asian Americans that struggle to get secondary and post-secondary education.

APAAC requires additional funding to support APAs to attain the education they need to become self-sufficient community members that will contribute to the diversity in our state. APAs come from over 30 different countries and speak even more different languages. Almost one-third of Connecticut's APAs lack English proficiency and cannot advocate for themselves. The APAAC will serve as a voice to a community that is silent.

Through additional funding the APAAC will work with grassroots community organizations to advocate for access to education through appropriate services. Educating APAs on their rights on education will also impact access to healthcare and economic mobility. It is a common misconception that our community has no real problems. Through additional funding the APAAC will work on state, local and community levels to ensure access to education, mental health and healthcare services for struggling APA communities to improve the quality of life for everyone in Connecticut. Please provide the APAAC with the additional funding it requires.

Thank you for your time,

Sounthaly Thammavong, LMSW