

**Written Testimony for
AAPI Commission Testimony, Operating Budget (HB 110)
Submitted by: Bounthanh Phommasathit
Laotian Mutual Assistance Association
Testifying as Proponent**

Chair Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate Finance committee,

My name is **Bounthanh Phommasathit, a bombing survivor and former Southeast Asian Refugee** and I live in **Pickerington, Ohio**. And I am representing **Laotian Mutual Assistance Association (LMAA)**.

Ohio's Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) population is one of the state's fastest-growing racial/ethnic demographic groups, having increased by 40% between 2000 and 2009. It is notable that currently, Asian and AAPI Ohioans are the only ethnic group without a state level entity that would allow for coordination of resources and provide a centralized point of contact.

For this reason, I am writing in support of the budget amendment that creates and funds the Ohio AAPI Commission and the Office of AAPI Affairs. With the escalation of anti-Asian violence that has accompanied the COVID-19 pandemic, the deaths of six Asian women on March 16th in Atlanta, and the loss of four Sikh lives in the Indianapolis shooting on April 15th, we in the Ohio Asian and AAPI community are living in a constant state of fear and anxiety. Something needs to change. While resolutions and statements of solidarity help bring awareness to anti-Asian hate, we must take actionable steps to protect AAPI communities from further harm and violence and to invest in our wellbeing and livelihood.

Your support for the Ohio AAPI Commission and Office of AAPI affairs along with your support for the additional two amendments listed below will help demonstrate that Ohio is invested in our community's safety and well-being:

1. Create and Fund the Ohio AAPI Affairs Commission and the Office of AAPI Affairs
2. \$2M earmarks for grants for community organizations that serve Asians and AAPIs.
3. Increases earmarks for Refugee Program Services by \$100,000 per year

I am also a state employee retiree, and volunteer to serve the community as a full-time community liaison. During the pandemic, working with vulnerable populations with language and culture barriers makes it exceedingly difficult to find some help for such a high demand in health and social services within the Southeast Asian communities. The budget amendments would be effective to establish an upstream resource for small non-profit organizations like LMAA.

The Commission would be a hub to find resources and trickle down the funding stream to assist vulnerable populations. For instance:

- **The AAPI Commission can be an entity that can perform asset mapping and could help provide language assistance and facilitate connecting AAPI community members to services needed → this also impacts Ohio's ability to get an accurate census count for a potential increase in federal funding.**
- **The AAPI Commission will work with AAPI small businesses owners and help to encourage economic growth and development in the fastest growing ethnic group in the state.**
- **As a community liaison, I see that the Commission will have channels to contact with all AAPIs groups and they can help identify and connect Asian and AAPI Ohioans to health services, particularly mental health, and promote health equity in a group that traditionally under-utilizes healthcare.**
- **Through the grassroots efforts, AAPI Commission support inclusion of Asian and AAPI history in public school curriculum, mobilize community for health and socioeconomic actions.**
- **The LMAA has been receiving the in-kinds supports from small businesses organizations and communities, the resources are for a quick fixed and it is not for the creation of a project or sustain any services for the long run. The amendments of the budget will help LMAA for capacity building and continue its sustainability through grant funding opportunities.**

I respectfully and strongly encourage the Senate Finance Committee to pass these amendments. Thank you for your time and for the opportunity to testify in support of the above amendments.