

Written Testimony for SC 2198
Submitted by: CORA MUNOZ Ph.D,R.N
Asian Festival Corporation AND Ohio Asian American Health Coalition
Testifying as Proponent

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

My name is CORA MUNOZ and I live in Worthington, Ohio. And I am currently the President of the Asian Festival Corporation AND the President of Ohio Asian American Health Coalition. I am also a member of the Ohio AAPI Advisory Council to the Governor and was appointed by the Governor to the Ohio Commission on Minority Health in which I served for almost 20 years. I also recently served in the Ohio Minority Health Strikeforce appointed by the Governor as the only person representing the Asian community in Ohio.

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. **Ohio is one of the top 20 states in the country with the largest AAPI Hate incident reports (Stop AAPI Hate report May 2021) . Something needs to change. We recently sponsored a statewide awareness forum on Anti-Asian Hate and Violence. 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

The creation of a Ohio Commission on AAPI Affairs is long overdue. For many years, the AAPI Advisory Council has been challenged with how Asians can receive important information and resources from the state. Issues such as language barriers and cultural appropriate services need to be addressed. This time of pandemic highlights the need to have coordinated efforts to communicate messages related to COVID 19 virus and hesitancy to have vaccination. Culturally tailored services are much needed. The Commission would serve as the central resource for Asian communities in Ohio to receive current and updated information in a culturally sensitive and respectful way. Just like other communities of color in Ohio, **WE NEED A COMMISSION ON AAPI AFFAIRS.**

As a healthcare professional, I know that Health disparities in the Asian communities continue to have a serious negative impact on the population. Hep B and Tuberculosis are common infections in Asians particularly in the refugee population. Cancer, Diabetes and Cardiovascular disease are prevalent. Additionally mental health challenges and addictions related to substances, alcohol and gambling are happening in the Asian population. The stigma and shame associated with mental illness leads to delayed treatment or no treatment at all therefore work, home and family systems are disrupted due to mental health issues affecting productivity and challenges in maintaining relationships and social connections. We need services for physical and mental health and culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate services. In addition to having interpreter and translation services, there is a fundamental need to TRAIN SERVICE PROVIDERS TO BE CULTURALLY COMPETENT.

A Commission will serve as a clearing hours for business and entrepreneurs to expand minority business and facilitate procurement of contracts and opportunities for funding. A commission can encourage economic growth and development in the fastest growing ethnic group in the state.

There is also a great need to support the Asian service organizations across the state who are serving and meeting the needs of the Asian community for health access, social services, language services, employment and business assistance. Disparities in health and in healthcare need to be eliminated. Efforts towards this goal can only be achieved with funding support from the state.

The Asian community is represented by about 16 Asian subgroups throughout the state of Ohio. These are: Chinese, Asian Indian, Filipinos, Koreans, Japanese, Lao, Vietnamese, Thai, Cambodian, Burmese, Bhutanese/ Nepali, Singaporean, Taiwanese, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Sri Lankans. These communities are diverse in language, religion, customs, beliefs and practices but united in one population as Asians.

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.