



Governor Kim Reynolds
Lt. Governor Adam Gregg
San Wong, Director

MEETING MINUTES

COMMISSION OF ASIAN & PACIFIC ISLANDER AFFAIRS (CAPI)

Date: Saturday, May 23, 2020

Time: 9:30 AM – 12:00 PM

Location: Remote Meeting via Google Meet

Conference Call – Public access provided

Commissioners Present:

Ben Jung, Chair – *West Des Moines*

James Suong – *Des Moines*

Michelle Yoshimura-Smith – *Des Moines*

Ritu Gurung – *Davenport*

Suresh Basnet – *Cedar Rapids*

Absent: Karlai Thornburg – Ames; Peggy La – Sioux City

DHR/CAS/API Staff:

Monica Stone, CAS Division Director/DHR Deputy Director

Tina Shaw, Executive Officer for Office of Asian & Pacific Islander Affairs/CAS

Guest Attendance: Mr. Ahmed Agyeman, Des Moines Area Community College; and Suzie Stroud, Crescent Healthcare Clinic/Pacific Islander Health Care Initiative and member of the Dubuque County Board of Health. Mr. Xiangheng Li, Des Moines was invited by Jung to speak on discrimination of Asians.

Public Comment: None

I. Call to Order

Chair Jung called the meeting to order at 9:07 AM. Five commissioners in attendance. Quorum present.

II. Approval of Past Meeting Minutes

Minutes of the 1/25/20 meeting were reviewed. **Motion by Jung, seconded by Basnet** to approve the minutes of 1/25/20 meeting. **Unanimous consent. Motion carried.**

Before tackling new business, Shaw introduced guests, Agyeman and Stroud, and invited them to speak about post-secondary education and healthcare related issues in light of COVID-19.

Agyeman briefed the commission on ways DMACC is continuing community college courses this summer virtually, and fall plans are being determined. Among virtual forums, DMACC is hosting an Asian & Pacific Islander Social Hour on June 3 to talk about admissions processes and answer questions. All API families are invited, and Shaw will assist to promote DMACC outreach as part of the EducAsian initiative. DMACC is underwriting a portion of the EducAsian scholarship competition this year.

Commission thanked DMACC and Agyeman for their continued efforts to improve post-secondary access and attainment to API students and families and for partnering on EducAsian despite COVID-19.

Stroud provided an on-the-ground situation report of COVID-19 in Dubuque and the disproportionate outcomes on the Marshallese in that community. To date, there have been 4 deaths and many in intensive care units battling the virus. Pacific Islanders, with Marshallese in particular, have higher rates of comorbidities including diabetes, hypertension and autoimmune compromising conditions such as cancer.

According to the [Pacific Islanders COVID-19 Response](#) Team: “Existing chronic health conditions put the community at disproportionately high risk of death. About 1 in 5 Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders have been diagnosed with heart disease, and NHPs are 46% more likely than average to be diagnosed with cancer -- a rate higher than any other racial group. High poverty rates, with implications of lack of access to healthcare, larger than average households, and a close-knit social structure may compound the risk and accelerate the spread of COVID-19. The elderly population requires particular attention as they most often have an existing condition and live in the household with family members who are likely to be essential workers and mobile thus increasing the risk of spread and death.”

The City of Dubuque is maximizing Community Foundation funding, and nonprofits such as Resources United and Project Rooted are providing essential supports such as culturally-aligned food, transportation, and in some cases, emergency housing at one of the seven churches serving the Marshallese community. Dubuque Paradise Church received a Dubuque Community Foundation grant and is providing direct services to more than 200 members of the Marshallese community.

As the commission is well-aware, Marshallese and other Compact of Free Association nationals are not eligible to receive Medicaid and thus denied access to healthcare in the US. Prior to 1996, when congress repealed it, COFA migrants were eligible to enroll in Medicaid, if not obtaining employer-sponsored health insurance. At the federal level, Congresswoman Abby Finkenauer is co-sponsoring H.R. 4821, “Covering our FAS Allies Act” which would restore Medicaid to COFA migrants.

Stroud also spoke on the stigma that Pacific Islanders are experiencing as the community at-large is singling them out for greater spread of the virus since many are essential workers with high numbers working at meat-packing plants, and inter-generational living arrangements do not afford them to quarantine or isolate safely.

Commission thanked Stroud for her advocacy work with and for the Pacific Islanders in Iowa to remove barriers to a better quality of life. Shaw reiterated how important Suzie's role in Dubuque's Public Health has been, and it has helped the Office and DHR stay better connected and educated on the health disparities and access barriers encountered by Pacific Islanders.

III. Asian & Pacific Islander Heritage Month

A. Iowa Public Media Campaign

Jung spoke on the anti-Asian sentiment and xenophobic attitudes in the face of COVID-19 covered in national and local media. Jung stated he would like to see the Commission adopt a statement or push out to the community an announcement which speaks to the current climate making clear its position in responding to pressures on API Iowans because of the Coronavirus.

Commission agreed to compose such a statement for future consideration. Shaw will assist.

Related to that, Jung would like to see the community collaborate and invest in a marketing (i.e., public relations campaign) which allows the API community to represent its own messaging when it comes to COVID-19 and Iowans of Asian and Pacific Islander heritage or background. He envisions individuals and local businesses chipping in and interested non-profits also helping to create and purchase advertising.

Jung noted he has a working relationship with Garnett and would inquire about costs to mount a public relations effort.

No action was taken related to a public affairs campaign.

Jung crafted an opinion letter he plans to submit to the Des Moines Register and asked the Commission to permit him to use his title as Chair of the Commission. Shaw asked if the name of his business would be attached. Jung responded "no" and that it would be signed Ben Jung, West Des Moines; Chair of the Commission of Asian & Pacific Islander Affairs.

Lengthy discussion ensued on timing and tone of the letter, if linked to the Commission. Recusal from voting is required only if it benefits a commissioner personally or professionally. Jung ensured neither is the case.

Motion by Suong, seconded by Yoshimura-Smith to permit Ben Jung to use his title as Chair on an opinion letter to the Des Moines Register and to consider input from fellow commissioners to modify it. **Ayes:** Suong, Gurung, Yoshimura-Smith, Jung. **Abstain:** Basnet. **Motion carried.**

B. Iowa API-Owned Small Businesses

Jung referred to several news articles featuring select API Iowans during COVID-19, one of which featured [Xiangheng Li of Des Moines](#) whose family owns Hong Kong Chinese Restaurant. Li's mother was shunned when a customer asked if she was Chinese and left when hearing she was from China.

Li expressed that APIs are also impacted by the Coronavirus on social media and has seen many social media posts and comments that are directly targeting APIs. From his experience, a lot of times, the direct victims are youths that have a higher usage of social media. Li thinks cyber-bullying directly linked to COVID-19 should be noted. The attacks on social media are anonymous and users hide behind a facade of security of not being punished. Li feels Tik Tok is one of the best examples where many users have created short videos that include prejudice and bias against APIs to capture attention.

IV. Strategic Plan: 2020 Plan Review and Public Comment Forum

Due to limited remaining time, Commissioners opted to move forward with the remaining parts of the agenda.

V. New Business

A. Commissioner Reports

Due to limited remaining time, Commissioners opted to move forward with the remaining parts of the agenda.

B. DHR Office of Asian & Pacific Islander Affairs – Tina Shaw

Shaw gave a brief report on the progress of the EducAsian scholarship program, in-coming calls seeking essential supports such a food, life insurance inquiries and indigent funeral funding requests.

C. DHR and CAS Report – Monica Stone

Stone gave a brief overview of the department's COVID-19 Language Access work and interagency supports.

VI. Public Comments – None

VII. Next Meeting

The next commission meeting will take place by Google Meet on Saturday, May 30 for the sole purpose of considering a Commission statement on discrimination and harassment of Asians and Pacific Islanders.

VIII. Adjournment

Motion by Jung to adjourn the meeting, Suong seconded. Unanimous consent. Meeting adjourned at 12:09 PM.