



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

MEETING MINUTES

COMMISSION OF ASIAN & PACIFIC ISLANDER AFFAIRS (CAPI)

Date: Tuesday, October 8, 2019

Time: Noon – 1:00 PM

Location: Lucas State Office Building – Room 208, 321 East 12th Street, Des Moines, IA 50319

Commissioners Present:

Ben Jung – *Des Moines* (phone)

Peggy La – *Sioux City* (phone)

James Suong – *Des Moines* (phone)

Karlai Thornburg – *Ames* (phone)

Absent: Suresh Basnet – *Cedar Rapids*, Ritu Gurung – *Davenport*, Michelle Yoshimura-Smith – *Des Moines*

DHR/CAS/API Staff:

Monica Stone, Deputy Director/Community Advocacy & Services Division Administrator

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

I. Roll Call

Chair Jung called the meeting to order at 12:05 PM. With four of seven commissioners in attendance, a quorum was present. Approval of the minutes from the 9/28/19 CAPI meeting were deferred to the next scheduled meeting.

II. New Business - Sioux City Community Resources – Micronesians (COFA Migrants)

Shaw updated the Commission on the situation unfolding in Sioux City related to Micronesians recruited from Pohnpei, an island of the Federated States of Micronesia, by Seaboard Triumph Foods (STF). Shaw contacted the Sioux City Human Rights Office and local nonprofits and learned of unsettling details including possible labor trafficking, lack of housing and resources, especially warm clothing, among other things.

As discussed at past meetings, individuals from Compact of Free Association (COFA) are classified as nonimmigrants and work-authorized, meaning they do not require a green card and are given Social Security numbers. COFA migrants also are able to travel to and from the US freely.

At the state level, the Iowa Economic Development Authority temporarily halted tax incentives to the plant.

But, despite a letter sent by the government of the Federated States of Micronesia to the US State Department to investigate STF's alleged dubious recruitment practices and employment contracts, no other action has yet been taken by local, state or federal authorities. Voices inside the Micronesian community stated that the fear among the newly-arrived Micronesians that they may lose their jobs or other retaliation, is preventing them from speaking with authorities. Language may be an additional barrier.

Furthermore, the Sioux City Hotel is operating as a make-shift dormitory and ad hoc human resources office where passports are being held and paychecks distributed. A Facebook video has surfaced that implicates hotel management for providing access to hotel rooms without the workers' consent.

Following numerous inquiries and conversations with local advocates, Shaw recommended that CAPI work with a trusted, multi-lingual Micronesian community advocate to conduct a needs assessment of those Micronesians who may be in dire circumstances, need assistance and are unaware of their rights under US law.

Lengthy conversation took place on the level of funding being requested. Shaw indicated that only mileage and hotel expenses covering two nights are requested at this time for the community advocate who will volunteer his own time. Shaw recommended that a level up to and not to exceed \$500 be authorized from the CAPI General Donation Fund for this purpose.

Motion by Jung, seconded by La to approve the collaboration with a multi-lingual Micronesian community advocate who will travel to Sioux City and work with La and Shaw to assess the scope of need and provide connectivity to the newly-arrived Micronesians in an amount not to exceed \$500 to be used exclusively for mileage and hotel reimbursement. **Unanimous consent. Motion passes.**

III. Public Comments

None.

IV. Adjournment

Motion by Jung, seconded by Suong to adjourn the meeting at 12:35 PM. **Unanimous consent. Motion passes.**