



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

## **MEETING MINUTES**

### COMMISSION OF ASIAN & PACIFIC ISLANDER AFFAIRS (CAPI)

**Date:** Saturday, December 12, 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*

Peggy La – *Sioux City*

Karlai Thornburg – *Ames*

Dr. Ritu Gurung - *Bettendorf*

Suresh Basnet – *Cedar Rapids*

#### **DHR/CAS/API Staff:**

San Wong, DHR Director (*ex-officio member*)

Sonya Streit, DHR Legislative Liaison, Public Information Officer and Director's Executive Assistant

Monica Stone, Community Advocacy & Services (CAS) Division Administrator

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

**Guest Attendance & Public Comment:** Over 40 community members and advocates from the Pacific Islander - Marshallese and other persons from the [Compact of Freely Associated States \(COFA\)](#) - population, as well as two state legislators were in attendance. Among those who self-identified:

Irene Maun—[Crescent Community Health Center; Pacific Islander Health Project, Dubuque](#)

Lata D'Mello, [Monsoon Asians & Pacific Islanders in Solidarity](#)

Sue Davison

Mira Mosley

Gary Collins, Crescent Community Health Center

State Senator Pam Jochum

Sister Patricia Conlan

Wihden Aise, Pacific Islander Health Project, Dubuque; COFA CANN

State Representative Charles Isenhardt

Aiyuko Maun, Monsoon Asians & Pacific Islanders in Solidarity

Almin Beckwell

Ann Morris, Crescent Community Health Center

Art Roche, Pacific Islander Health Project, Dubuque

Danya Alber, Monsoon Asians & Pacific Islanders in Solidarity, with grandparents  
Dustin and Christine Alfred  
Jacquie Easley Mcghee, Director of Health Equity, [Mercy One Des Moines](#)  
Kelly Larson, [Human Rights Director, City of Dubuque](#)  
Juliet Sietto  
Marlynn Livai, a peer educator in the public school system  
Normai Jamey  
Stan Samson  
Ann Jamore  
Ruthena Lenja  
Rayner Bing  
Fredda Willa  
Rayner Bing  
Ann Jamore

### **I. Call to Order**

Cmsnr. Jung presided and called the meeting to order at 9:34 AM. Six of seven commissioners are in attendance. Quorum is present.

### **II. Approval of the Agenda**

**Motion by Jung, seconded by Yoshimura-Smith, to approve the agenda as proposed. Unanimous consent. Motion carried.**

### **III. Approval of Past Meeting Minutes**

Minutes of the 10/3/20 meeting were reviewed. **Motion by Yoshimura-Smith, seconded by Suong to approve the minutes of 10/3/20 meeting. Unanimous consent. Motion carried.**

### **IV. Public Comment on CAPI Strategic Plan and Initiatives**

Healthcare Access – Medicaid Coverage for COFA Iowans

- Irene Maun: 1) provided background about the Republic of the Marshall Islands regarding the environmental and health factors, as well as the high prevalence of diabetes in the Pacific Islander community; 2) explained that eight to nine Marshallese in the Dubuque area have succumbed to COVID, which equals roughly one percent of the Marshallese community; 3) highlighted health disparities among Marshallese and other COFA migrants (Micronesians, Palauans); and 4) requested state support for the restoration of Medicaid to help community stay well; as well as other state assistance to get through the pandemic and next few months.
- Pastor Stan Samson stated that Marshallese live in high numbers in Dubuque, Waterloo, and Cedar Rapids. He and others have been working with the Marshallese Ambassador to the US and read a portion of a letter from the Ambassador that highlighted the importance of providing the

Marshallese community with medical treatment, because many are health care professionals who work in nursing homes. He explained further that COFA migrants were covered by Medicaid until 1996, but a federal law mistakenly included them in the “immigrants” category which made them ineligible for Medicaid. Under federal law and the compact, the COFA population are considered migrants or non-immigrants, not immigrants.

- Wihden Aise stated the entire COFA community, which includes Micronesians and Palauans, as well as Marshallese, would like to have their voices added to the Medicaid restoration conversation. He explained the unique COFA immigration status that is often misunderstood by the system and processes. Essential healthcare for low-income, otherwise Medicaid-eligible COFA Iowans was critical prior to COVID and even more so now during COVID-19. Many COFAs who work in packing plants and healthcare-related fields have been affected in some way by the pandemic. He pointed to a spike in cases among Micronesians in Maquoketa. Crescent Community Health Center helped them stay healthy through education, appointment follow-ups, and reminders to stay on and finish a course of medication and treatment. Medicaid restoration will address affordability and accessibility to healthcare for COFA community members.
- Lata D’Mello provided information about Monsoon’s services to the Pacific Islander communities in the areas of sexual assault and human trafficking. Monsoon urges legislators to push for policy change in health care and restore Medicaid benefits to the COFA population that was redacted in 1996 by Congress. COVID-19 compounds the issue of labor trafficking, and Monsoon is working on obtaining [US DOJ-Victims of Crime Act \(VOCA\) funding](#). Given that the Marshall Islands are experiencing higher than normal sea levels, and other environmental factors such as nuclear testing fall-out, the migration of islanders to the U.S. will increase, and the federal government, states and systems should prepare.
- Gary Collins shared that State Representative Shannon Lundgren, while chair of the House Resources Committee, met with Crescent Community Health. COVID-19 has highlighted issues on healthcare and other social determinants among the COFA population, especially the Marshallese. Crescent is working with hospitals and community foundations to reach out to the broader community and policymakers including Iowa’s US Senators - Grassley and Ernst - last fall. Getting support nationally and at state level will help restore Medicaid.
- [State Representative Isenhardt](#): 1) Encouraged increased outreach and advocacy. He has been participating in health board meetings in Eastern Iowa on issues affecting the migrant community, which were not public until community members fell ill and passed away. A local physician raised money to support families. Suggests strengthening outreach and advocacy role for marginalized and minority communities who are heavily impacted; and 2) Suggested this commission explore efforts

that could reduce financial burden of hospitals impacted when COFA migrants do not have Medicaid or uninsured.

- [State Senator Pam Jochum](#): Encouraged increased advocacy and awareness. Hospitals, human rights, association of community health centers, should have a unified voice in this effort. Senator Jochum will personally contact Director Kelly Garcia at the Iowa Department of Human Services to advocate for Medicaid coverage for COFA Migrants.

Discussion followed by commissioners and guests and centered on how to replicate what Eastern Iowa via the Pacific Islander Healthcare Initiative is doing in other parts of the state and how to leverage limited resources. La emphasized that Marshallese and Micronesians also live, work in Northwest Iowa - especially Sioux City - where she owns an Asian grocery and has gotten to know many residents who shop there.

Collins responded that the Dubuque Pacific Islander Advisory Council consists of schools, hospitals, Crescent Community Health, and Marshallese leaders. One way to expand local efforts is to create a statewide advocacy group. Crescent will start including others in the discussion.

Aise offered to assist with Micronesian outreach efforts in other parts of the state.

Samson noted that Marshallese from Nebraska have moved to various areas in Iowa and may be able to serve as resources in their communities.

Rep. Isenhardt suggested establishing relationships with new legislators.

## **V. Old Business**

### COFA Health Care Policy Recommendation & Actions

Shaw recapped that a letter of support from the Commission to the Governor, DHS and select legislators was transmitted to seek state action absent federal action. Shaw noted that Megan Hall is the new policy advisor in the Governor's Office assigned to DHR, but she was unable to attend the meeting. However, Megan invited anyone to send her questions/comments and offered to find a time to meet if there was an interest in doing so.

Shaw, on behalf of the Commission, engaged all identified stakeholders both at the state and federal levels, and the Commission has raised and elevated the issue by providing information to policy staff for both Senators Grassley and Ernst. Furthermore, the Commission via DHR officially requested [DHS-IME](#) Medicaid program staff to study the needs of the COFA migrants in the Medicaid system to submit along with future federal requests.

Shaw reported that last known legislative action included a bill introduced by Rep. Isenhardt and House Human Resources Committee Chair's, Rep. Lundgren, request for Iowa DHS to research the issue and

conduct a needs assessment as a precursor in seeking a pilot program for a Medicaid state waiver. Rep. Isenhardt noted that the new [Human Resources Committee Chair is Rep. Ann Meyer](#) of Boone. Suggested forming a statewide coalition or delegation before meeting with the Governor's Office. Include stakeholders and representatives from the hospitals and other health associations.

Ann Morris shared that many Marshallese do not have health insurance but work at Hormel. Crescent has a sliding fee scale and a grant, as well as donations, to help pay for copays. Community partners, hospitals, and clinics also provide free services. Crescent is assisting Marshallese to get passports and sign up for ACA Marketplace insurance – currently they can qualify for the Marketplace, but not Medicaid. Children who are born in the US are eligible for Medicaid benefits because they are U.S. citizens as a birthright.

Gary indicated that Crescent Health Center has a [340b pharmacy program](#) to purchase medications at a discount and pass savings back to patients via the Pacific Islander Healthcare program.

Aise shared that in Maquoketa, where many Micronesians reside, 10 percent of the community is considered high-risk (i.e., diabetic, heart disease, 65 years of age +).

## **VI. New Business**

### **A. Commissioner Reports**

Cmsnr. Jung: 1) Congratulated Peggy on receiving the Immigrant Entrepreneur Summit's Spirit Award; 2) Announced that the Governor's Census Committee date to finish up data collection is 12/31/20 and that there has been a staff change in the Governor/Lt. Governor's office. The official conclusion regarding participation on the committee remains unclear; and 3) Indicated an interest to have a conversation with the Governor's policy advisor to address Iowa's sharing of DOT driver's license for the census.

### **B. DHR Update – Monica Stone**

Stone: 1) Highlighted DHR Division updates that were submitted for the DHR Board meeting. The Division of Criminal and Juvenile Justice Planning published several reports, one focusing on racial disparities; 2) Noted the department's continued work on Language Access to help convey emergency information, public health measures, public's understanding of state programs and regulations, and vaccine information; 3) Reiterated that Tina Shaw has accepted and started a new position in September as Data Officer within the Iowa Department of Human Rights. One aspect of the data work will be focused toward helping DHR commissions articulate and build public policies to package and present to policy makers and other stakeholders. The Executive Officer 1 position for the API Office will eventually be advertised.

### **C. Office of API Affairs – Tina Shaw**

Next week, the API Office and the Iowa Civil Rights Commission will be releasing housing resources that were funded by the federal CARES Act. Additional partners include EMBARC and Genesis Youth Foundation of Des Moines. There will be 10 educational videos and 10 brochures in select Burmese and African languages. Upon request, the Iowa Civil Rights Commission can provide educational

trainings on housing discrimination. The project is to address the difficulties many refugees and immigrants face when renting or buying a home - compounded by language barriers. Many are unfamiliar with the US legal system, civil rights to understand the processes and full protections under the law.

Rep. Isenhart referred to a Des Moines Register article that reported some Iowans may have to pay back unemployment benefits. DHR will continue to keep an eye on this issue, and Iowa Workforce Development tracks this information.

#### **IV. Next Meeting**

Shaw will send out a survey to schedule the next meeting.

#### **VII. Adjournment**

**Motion by Suong, seconded by La, to adjourn the meeting. Unanimous consent. Motion carried.**

Meeting adjourned at 12:00 PM.