



HMONG CULTURAL CENTER

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Hmong Cultural Center of Minnesota Written Testimony to MN House Legacy Committee

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Operation Metro Surge and related federal immigration policies have had a strong impact on Hmong Cultural Center's Adult English and Citizenship classes. During Operation Metro Surge, our ESL students did not feel safe coming to class in-person given the ICE operations going on in St. Paul. We also could not send our van out to pick up students. We moved classes online but our class attendance was strongly impacted as many of our students are older and have lower literacy levels and thus are not comfortable attending class online. For this reason, we were not able to serve almost half of our adult ESL students during the duration of Operation Metro Surge. We estimate we lost about 500 contact hours in our Adult Education program during both January and February for a total of around 1,000 contact hours lost due to Operation Metro Surge. We are reimbursed by the MN Dept. of Education based on student contact hours and this will likely have significant negative impacts on our budget allocation next year.

Also extremely concerning are impacts of recent federal immigration policies on our Citizenship Education program. In November, the Trump Administration suspended the processing of naturalization applications for persons born in Laos, this suspension remains in effect at this current time. Most Hmong green card holders in Minnesota and the United States were born in Laos though they were minorities in this country. Due to this policy, since early November, most of the students in our Citizenship classes have

been stuck in a state of limbo. They have paid hundreds of dollars in application fees to USCIS but their applications are frozen and interviews are not being scheduled at the local USCIS office. We have had clients who passed their interview in October 2025 but never received their naturalization certificate. We had another elderly client who has resided in the U.S. since the late 1970s after arriving from a refugee camp but had their previously scheduled interview cancelled because they happen to have been born in Laos. Because of the Trump Administration's suspension of processing of naturalization applications for those born in Laos, most Hmong green card holders (permanent residents), not only in Minnesota but the entire United States are unable to have their applications for naturalization to become U.S. Citizens move forward. This is obviously an issue of considerable concern for the clients we serve and the Hmong community as a whole.

We encourage our elected officials to find a way to assist those community organizations that will be or have been negatively financially impacted by Operation Metro Surge. We also request that our elected representatives advocate for the rights of Hmong and other affected immigrants and refugees to once again be able to apply for naturalization and have their cases processed in a fair, equitable and timely manner in accordance with U.S. immigration law including the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 which ended quotas for immigration and naturalization based on country of origin.



**Testimony for Legacy Finance Committee
Mee Vang, Board President, the United Hmong Family
Wednesday, March 11th, 2026**

Thank you Co-Chairs, Vice Chairs, and Members of the Committee for the opportunity to testify today. We appreciate Co-Chair Samantha Vang and the committee's continued support and leadership to support our organization with past state appropriations for cultural events that has become an important cultural tradition in the City of Saint Paul and the State of Minnesota.

My name is Mee Vang, and I serve as the Board President for The United Hmong Family (UHF), a nonprofit organization that hosts some of the largest Hmong cultural events in Minnesota, including the Minnesota Hmong New Year and the Hmong International Freedom Festival.

The Hmong community first arrived in Minnesota in the late 1970s. Since then, the community has grown significantly and is now an important part of the state's cultural fabric. As generations of Hmong families grow up in the United States, we face a real challenge of cultural preservation. Many Hmong youth today are losing connections to language, cultural traditions, and artistic expression.

UHF was established as a nonprofit in 2017 to address this issue by continuing and expanding long-standing cultural events such as the Minnesota Hmong New Year, which has been celebrated in Minnesota for more than 40 years. These cultural celebrations serve as one of the few opportunities for Hmong youth and families to connect with their heritage through art, traditional dance, storytelling, clothing, and community gathering.

Our events are not only cultural celebrations—they are also critical economic drivers that sustain the work of our nonprofit and support hundreds of small businesses and artists in our community.

For example, during the most recent Minnesota Hmong New Year celebration, all 106 vendor spaces were sold out. These vendors include small businesses, artists, food vendors, and community organizations that rely on these events for income and visibility. Vendor fees, sponsorships, and event attendance are also



key revenue streams that allow UHF to fund our cultural programming throughout the year.

However, recent public safety operations such as Operation Metro Surge have created significant fear and uncertainty within the immigrant and refugee communities we serve. Many families have expressed concerns about attending large community events out of fear that they or their relatives could encounter immigration enforcement or other law enforcement actions.

This fear has real consequences. When community members feel unsafe attending cultural gatherings, attendance drops, vendors lose revenue, and nonprofits like ours lose critical funding needed to sustain cultural programming. We are already hearing concerns from families and vendors about whether it is safe to attend major cultural events such as the Hmong International Freedom Festival this summer.

For organizations like UHF, reduced attendance does not just mean smaller crowds—it directly affects the financial sustainability of our programs and threatens the ability of our community to continue preserving and celebrating our culture.

In a recent survey sent via email to all of over 200 vendors for the Hmong International Freedom Festival (HIFF) from last year, we received 55 responses. Unanimously, many shared they enjoyed being a vendor and wished to return. However, over ninety percent reported they will not be returning with the increase and surge of Ice activities. This summer festival had foot traffic of 47,000 people last year, and 58,000 in 2024. Vendor revenue helps to maintain this event for all our spectators each year.

Despite these challenges, our community remains deeply committed to preserving Hmong culture and sharing it with all Minnesotans. Our events bring together tens of thousands of people every year and contribute to Minnesota's cultural diversity, tourism, and local economy.

As our programs continue to grow, we are continuing to manage the \$300,000 from the Legacy budget to support the Minnesota Hmong New Year and expand



cultural programming such as our annual dance competition, which highlights traditional Hmong artistic expression through dance, clothing, and storytelling.

This investment has helped ensure that our cultural traditions continue to thrive and that future generations of Hmong Minnesotans can remain connected to their heritage.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today.