

**Jobs Conference Committee
Chair Noor and Chair Pratt
SF 4091 Omnibus Bill**

Testimony

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Coalition of Asian American Leaders

May 16, 2022
1:00 - 4:00pm

Good afternoon Chair Noor, Chair Pratt and members of the conference committee

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is ThaoMee Xiong, I am the Executive and Network Director of the Coalition of Asian American Leaders or CAAL. CAAL is a network of over 5,500 Asian Minnesotan leaders throughout the state of Minnesota from as far North as Thief River Falls to as far South as Mankato and Worthington, as well as Rochester, Minneapolis, Champlin and Coon Rapids and other parts of the 7 county metro area.

I am here today to urge your support for investments in Asian Minnesotan communities to address the urgent economic challenges our communities are facing.

Asian Minnesotans are the fastest growing population in the United States and in Minnesota - and we are an essential part of Minnesota's economy. Nearly 300,000 Asian Americans call Minnesota home. Our collective buying power exceeds \$10 billion. Over 15,000 businesses in our state are owned by Asian Minnesotans - many of these are small and micro businesses (such as family- run restaurants, nail salons,

and neighborhood grocery stores). They provide the economic backbone of our communities.

But our communities are struggling with the severe economic consequences of the pandemic. We have seen an increase in violence and harassment targeting Asian Americans that are motivated by racial bias and intolerance. There is now an occurrence that is reported almost weekly from small acts of intimidation and harassment to physical attacks and even violent death all happening in public places like schools, beauty salons, grocery stores and parking lots. Places that we expect to be safe.

These acts of violence and death have a direct economic impact - declines in customer base, increased security costs, only working during daylight hours, job losses and even business closures.

The economic cost of hate crimes comes on top of the ongoing economic challenges of the pandemic. A survey of small business owners conducted by CAAL found that 43 percent of small Asian-owned businesses have been unable to pay bills during the pandemic, and half have been forced to reduce their business hours or temporarily close.

Some of the biggest workforce challenges are experienced by Asian women - a national report stated that Asian women experience the highest rates of long-term unemployment of any racial/ethnic groups in the U.S. in 2020. We cannot underestimate the economic harms on Asian Americans in Minnesota and across the country in the past 2 years.

States across the country - Wisconsin, California, New York - have recently recognized these urgent needs and responded with major investments in Asian Americans.

We urge Minnesota lawmakers to do the same. A House provision under consideration by this committee would invest \$1 million into Asian Minnesotan economic recovery. This targeted investment - that has bipartisan support in both the House and the Senate - would provide resources through the Coalition of Asian American Leaders to regrant to Asian MN nonprofits and small businesses to recover and rebuild coming out of the pandemic.

Investments in Asian Minnesotan economic recovery is urgently needed - and would benefit Minnesota's economic recovery as a whole. Please support this targeted investment in Asian Minnesotans at this critical time.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.