

March 26, 2024

Chair Leon Lillie
House Legacy Finance Committee
MN House of Representatives
365 State Office Building St. Paul, MN 55155
651-296-1188
rep.leon.lillie@house.mn.gov

Dear Chair Lillie:

I am writing this letter to testify and asking you and your committee's full support of the HF No. 4996, which is "appropriating money to celebrate 50 years of Hmong and Southeast Asian communities in Minnesota." All of your support of this legislation will provide the Southeast Asian communities and/or organizations the opportunities to organize, curate, and develop educational programs for all Minnesotans to come learn about their sacrifices and human stories that began here 50 years ago. This Anniversary will have life-changing, strong impacts for these communities and all Minnesotans as they come to pay tribute, honor, celebrate, and bring closure and healing from the Vietnam War Era that tore their homelands and lives apart.

I experienced first-hand the positive impacts that Legacy dollars have had on my Hmong community. In 2015, I was the co-curator of the "We Are Hmong Minnesota" exhibit at the MN History Center to commemorate the Hmong's 40th Anniversary of migrating to Minnesota that began in 1975. I volunteered for the most part, but the outcome had a tremendous cultural impact on the Center and the communities. This celebration - through exhibits, community gatherings, and story-telling - brought both Hmong and non-Hmong to come together to learn about each other's narratives. For the Hmong students, this celebration gave them inspiration and the opportunity to learn about their history and identity. For the Hmong parents, they felt appreciated that their stories are being honored and not forgotten.

The Legacy funds from this bill will have positive outcomes for our underserved SE Asian communities as they plan and implement programs to honor and commemorate a part of our State of Minnesota's heritages and legacies. Shall you or any of your committee members have questions regarding this letter, please feel free to reach me directly at 651-621-0006 or by email at vangminnesota@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

Noah Vang
Hmong Community Researcher
308 Magnolia Ave. E.
St. Paul, MN 55130

Community impacts from the “We Are Hmong Minnesota” exhibit, celebrating the Hmong’s 40th Anniversary at the MN History Center in 2015:





Program Description

Experience the journey the Hmong took from Southeast Asia to their new homeland in Minnesota four decades ago at the opening of "We Are Hmong Minnesota." Celebrate the contributions of this vital and active community with music and dance performances, displays, fashion, games, demonstrations and multi-generational hands-on activities.

Program Details

Date: March 7, 2015
Site: Minnesota History Center
Program Manager: Wendy Freshman
Total Attendance: 3,500
Survey Respondents: 240
Response Rate: 7%

RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Gender:

Female	67%	152
Male	33%	76

Age:

18-29	47%	107
30-39	23%	53
40-49	13%	30
50-59	6%	14
60-69	6%	13
70-79	3%	6
80 or above	1%	2

Ethnicity:

Asian American/Pacific Islander	73%	165
-Hmong-American	62%	139
Caucasian/White	20%	45
Multi-racial	4%	8
African American/Black	1%	3
Hispanic/Latino	1%	3
Declined to answer	1%	3

Respondent residence:

Twin Cities Metro	95%	180
Greater Minnesota	4%	7
Out of State	1%	2

Household income:

Less than \$25,000	15%	34
\$25,000 - \$49,999	28%	64
\$50,000 - \$74,999	24%	55
\$75,000 - \$99,999	9%	20
\$100,000 - \$124,999	7%	16
\$125,000 or more	5%	12
Declined to answer	11%	24

Attended event with:

Family member(s)	64%	145
Friend(s)	26%	59
Spouse/significant other only	18%	40
Came alone	5%	12
Other	4%	9

Visiting with children:

Yes	51%	116
No	49%	112

MNHS Membership:

Yes	11%	26
No	89%	201

History Center visits in past year:

First time:	59%	133
2-3 times:	29%	65
4-5 times:	7%	16
6-7 times:	1%	3
8-9 times:	2%	4
More than 10 times	2%	5

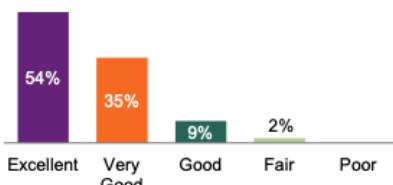
Heard about event

Facebook	49%	112
Word of Mouth	44%	100
MNHS Website	13%	30
Newspaper	13%	29
Billboard	11%	26
Hmong Radio	11%	24
MNHS Magazine	9%	20
Email Notification	9%	20
Staff/volunteer	8%	19
Hmong Times/Hmong Today	8%	18
Hmong TV	7%	16
Other Radio (i.e. MPR)	7%	15
Twitter	3%	7
Other	3%	7

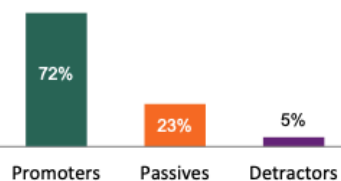
*Other responses: Hmong Pages, Hope Community Academy Family Activity, Kare11, Unwars of event

Institutional Dashboard

Overall Experience



Net Promoter Score: +67



Family Audience Dashboard



Increased my family's appreciation of the Minnesota Historical Society as a meaningful family recreation experience. **60%** Strongly Agree, **31%** Agree, **8%** Neutral, **1%** Disagree, **1%** Strongly Disagree

Increased my family's interest in learning more about Minnesota's diverse history and cultural traditions. **55%** Strongly Agree, **36%** Agree, **8%** Neutral, **1%** Disagree, **1%** Strongly Disagree

Increased my family's knowledge of Minnesota history, places and culture. **49%** Strongly Agree, **37%** Agree, **12%** Neutral, **1%** Disagree, **1%** Strongly Disagree

Increased my family's awareness of Minnesota's people and history. **48%** Strongly Agree, **37%** Agree, **14%** Neutral, **1%** Disagree, **1%** Strongly Disagree



Program prompted sharing of information among family members **16%** A Great Deal, **39%** Quite a Bit, **36%** Neutral, **7%** A Little, **2%** Not at All

Liked best about the event:

Art activities & games	18%	40
We Are Hmong Minnesota exhibit	18%	39
Artifacts/Clothing/Displays	15%	33
Historical Content	15%	32
Performances	11%	25
Celebrating/Pride in Hmong culture	10%	22
History Center exhibits	10%	22
Kid/Family-Friendly	10%	21
Cultural Content	10%	21
Informative/Educational	10%	21
All Others	46%	131

Could improve event:

Nothing to improve	26%	46
Overcrowded/More event space	20%	36
More/Different artifacts	10%	18
Wayfinding/signage	9%	16
Parking	8%	14
We Are Hmong Minnesota exhibit - too small/improve flow	7%	13
More performance/activities	6%	11
More/Improved content	5%	9
All Others	18%	36

Diversity of activities, friendly and warm environment, and the overall excitement throughout the day from everyone.

All those belongings [in the Hmong exhibit] reminds me of who we are. It was nice to finally see us behind glass cases

Hmong, all ages, gathered to learn their history and appreciate being Hmong

Well, there is so much that did not make it into the exhibit. I think for the 50th anniversary, maybe more space could be provided.

Add other Hmong styles of clothing to represent all of the other tribes too.

Parking information ahead of time, better directions to locations of exhibits inside the museum.



SGU
Veterans and Families of USA

Date: March 26, 2024

To: Rep. Leon Lillie
Chair, House Legacy Finance Committee
MN House of Representatives
365 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155
651-296-1188

From: Tong Vang
President, SGU Veterans and Families of USA
800 Minnehaha Ave. E., Ste. 375
St. Paul, MN 55106

Re: Statement in support of the 50th Anniversary / H.F. No. 4996

Dear Chair Lillie:

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to present my testimonial in support of the H.F. No. 4996. Our Hmong and Southeast Asian communities began our lives here in the State of Minnesota from nothing, beginning in 1975.

As a lieutenant of the Secret War, I saw many of my comrades being killed and were injured from the frontline. We lost everything when the Secret War/Vietnam War ended in 1975. We were forced from our homes, hunted down as U.S. allies by the communists Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese Army, and lived as refugees in the concentration camps in Thailand.

I urge you and your committee to pass this bill to provide some Legacy funds for our Minnesota's SE Asian communities to create educational programs/activities to teach, reflect, honor, and celebrate this 50th Anniversary. Today, the majority of our SE Asian children who are born here have already forgotten our sacrifices for America from the Vietnam War. Thus, the programs created from this Legacy fund will educate our stories, bring communities together to share our common histories, and to pass on our legacies to the current and future generations of the hardships that we overcame to build our communities to what it is today.

I thank all of you for your exemplary leadership as public servants and for your consideration of my testimony. I can be reached by email at sguminnnesota@gmail.com.

Sincerely,



HMONG CULTURAL CENTER

Koom Haum Hmoob Kab Lis Kev Cai

**375 University Avenue West - Suite 204, Saint Paul, Minnesota 55103
Phone (651) 917-9937, Fax (651) 917-9978, Web: www.hmongcc.org**

To Whom It May Concern:

Hmong Cultural Center is providing this letter in support of HF 4996, a bill in support of appropriations for community grants activities and events to recognize and commemorate the 50th anniversary of Hmong and Southeast Asians in Minnesota. Founded 32 years ago in 1992, Hmong Cultural Center is the one of the oldest surviving Hmong community organizations in Minnesota. All those years ago, Hmong Cultural Center was started by a group of Hmong elders to help preserve Hmong culture and promote cross-cultural understanding between Hmong and non-Hmong in our state. Hmong Cultural Center continues this mission today with popular programs including arts instruction in the Qeej instrument for children and youth, ESL and Citizenship classes for Hmong and other recent immigrants and refugees, a Hmong Resource Center Library and a 2,000 square-foot museum open to the public and for school field trips 7 days a week on University Avenue just 4 blocks from the State Capitol.

In our museum exhibits, we highlight the early history of Hmong in Minnesota starting in 1975, waves of Hmong settlement to St. Paul and the state from the 1970s through the present day as well as Hmong achievements and contributions to Minnesota and the United States. For the Hmong community, the 50th anniversary of the first Hmong refugees coming to Minnesota is a very significant milestone. This is an anniversary the Hmong community would also like to share with others to help them better understand the many obstacles the Hmong community in Minnesota has overcome over the past half century including poverty, cultural and language barriers and racism and discrimination to become successful citizens and make important contributions to our state. With a population of 95,000 as counted in the 2020 Census, the Hmong are by far the largest Southeast Asian community in Minnesota.

For all of these reasons, we strongly support HF 4996. The legislation will allow both the Hmong and Southeast Asian community to organize multiple activities and events to commemorate and celebrate this very important anniversary and share the significance of our community's history with all of Minnesota. Thank you and please feel free to contact us with any additional questions about our support for this worthwhile bill.

Yours Sincerely,

Txongpao Lee

Txongpao Lee, Executive Director

Mark Pfeifer

Dr. Mark Pfeifer, Director of Programs



Vietnamese Community of Minnesota
400 Old Hwy 8 NW # 2,
New Brighton, MN 55112
www.vietnam-minnesota.org
Phone: (612) 888-1207
Email: VietofMN@gmail.com

March 25, 2024

Mike Molzahn
House Legacy Finance Committee
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Saint Paul, MN 55155

My name is Tri Tang, President of Vietnamese Community of Minnesota on behalf of 35,000 Vietnamese we are representing we would like to strongly oppose the passage of HF 4996 in total or in an amended form. This legislation is totally unfair to those communities who fought alongside the United States Military during the Vietnam Conflict. This proposed funding for a Commemorative Event of the 50th Anniversary of the ending of the Vietnam Conflict is unacceptable to our communities and is likely to get little if any participation from them.

One of our missions is to promote cross-culture interaction and fostering mutual understanding, cooperation between the Vietnamese, Laotian, Hmong, and Cambodian Communities. Our unity is stressed when legislation such as this is introduced and passed enriching one community over others. Insulting the death of millions of people by calling this even a celebration; Dividing communities in such a way by offering money to one community and not others or weighting the access to one over another only weaken or SEA Communities and in turn weaken the cohesive fabric of Minnesota.

Our communities' members would have testified and opposed SF 5065 if it had not been introduced and heard with lightning speed by Chairman Houg Hawj in the Senate Legacy Committee. The heavy-handed actions of leadership have prevented our communities from gaining access to, read and study these bills and then express our opinion, after all we are the subject of the legislation and the Commemoration Event. Our communities feel strongly that the legislature has omitted the vast majority our Southeast Asian Communities over the years while supporting the Hmong nearly exclusively. The Hmong have enjoyed public support and funding for decades. Other Asian communities have not. Its time Minnesota shares its resources in an equitable way. We understand another inclusive funding bill has been introduced and is awaiting a hearing. We would strongly encourage the committee to hear that bill. Governor Walz often expounds upon Minnesota as being "One Minnesota". In our opinion and experience it is far from it.

Better Together,

Tri Tang
President of Vietnamese Community of Minnesota



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March 25, 2024

Mike Molzahn
House Legacy Finance Committee
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Saint Paul, MN 55155

I, Hung Nguyen, am honored to serve as the Treasure of the Vietnamese Community of Minnesota. On behalf of the 35,000 individuals we represent, I convey our steadfast opposition to the passage of HF 4996, whether in its current form or with any modifications. This proposed legislation significantly overlooks the sacrifices made by communities who stood alongside the United States Military during the Vietnam Conflict.

The provision of funds for a Commemorative Event commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the end of the Vietnam Conflict is unacceptable to our communities and is unlikely to garner substantial participation. Our mission revolves around nurturing cross-cultural interactions and fostering mutual understanding among Vietnamese, Laotian, Hmong, and Cambodian Communities. The enactment of legislation that privileges one community over others undermines our collective unity. Describing this event as a celebration is deeply disrespectful to the millions who lost their lives during and after the war.

By favoring one community over others in terms of financial support or access, this legislation undermines the cohesion of Southeast Asian Communities and diminishes Minnesota's unity. Regrettably, our communities were unable to fully engage with and voice our concerns regarding SF 5065 due to its accelerated processing by Chairman Houg Hawj in the Senate Legacy Committee.

The actions of leadership have impeded our communities' ability to scrutinize and offer feedback on these bills, despite being directly impacted by the legislation and the Commemoration Event. Over time, the legislature has disproportionately supported the Hmong community while disregarding the broader Southeast Asian Communities.

It is imperative for Minnesota to distribute its resources fairly among all communities. We are cognizant of another inclusive funding bill awaiting a hearing and strongly urge the committee to prioritize its consideration. Although Governor Walz often speaks of Minnesota as "One Minnesota," our experience suggests that this unity remains distant.

Better Together,

Hung Nguyen

Treasure of Vietnamese Community of Minnesota



Vietnamese Community of Minnesota
400 Old Hwy 8 NW # 2,
New Brighton, MN 55112
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Email: VietofMN@gmail.com

March 25, 2024

Mike Molzahn
House Legacy Finance Committee
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Saint Paul, MN 55155

I am **Martino Nguyen, Director of External Liaison of the Vietnamese Community of Minnesota**. On behalf of the 35,000 Vietnamese individuals we represent, we express our firm opposition to the passage of HF 4996, whether in its entirety or in any modified form. This proposed legislation gravely disregards the sacrifices made by communities who stood alongside the United States Military during the Vietnam Conflict.

The allocation of funds for a Commemorative Event marking the 50th Anniversary of the end of the Vietnam Conflict is unacceptable to our communities and is unlikely to garner significant participation. Our mission includes fostering cross-cultural interactions and mutual understanding among Vietnamese, Laotian, Hmong, and Cambodian Communities. The introduction and passage of such legislation that favors one community over others undermines our unity. Referring to this event as a celebration is an insult to the millions who lost their lives during and after the war.

By offering financial support to one community while excluding others or privileging one community's access over another's, the legislation weakens the cohesion of Southeast Asian Communities and erodes the fabric of Minnesota's unity. Unfortunately, our communities were unable to fully engage with and express our concerns regarding SF 5065 due to its expedited processing by Chairman Houg Hawj in the Senate Legacy Committee.

The actions of leadership have hindered our communities' ability to scrutinize and provide feedback on these bills, despite being the subjects directly affected by the legislation and the Commemoration Event. Over the years, the legislature has disproportionately supported the Hmong community while neglecting the broader Southeast Asian Communities.

It is time for Minnesota to distribute its resources equitably among all communities. We are aware of another inclusive funding bill awaiting a hearing and strongly urge the committee to prioritize its consideration. Governor Walz often speaks of Minnesota as "One Minnesota," but in our experience, this unity is far from reality.

Better Together,

Martino Nguyen
Director of External Liaison of Vietnamese Community of Minnesota

CAAVWV
Coalition of Allied Afghan & Vietnam War Veterans
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102



March 25, 2024

Chairman Leon Lillie
House Legacy Finance Committee
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Saint Paul, MN 55155

On behalf of the Coalition of Allied Afghan and Vietnam War Veterans we would like to strongly oppose the passage of **HF 4996** in total or in an amended form. This legislation is totally unfair to those communities who fought alongside the United States Military during the Vietnam Conflict. This proposed funding for a Commemorative Event of the 50th Anniversary of the ending of the Vietnam Conflict is unacceptable to our communities and is likely to get little if any participation from them.

Our Coalition has from its inception has attempted and been quite successful frankly in uniting communities. Our unity is stressed when legislation such as this is introduced and passed enriching one community over others. Dividing communities in such a way by offering money to one community and not others or weighting the access to one over another only weaken or SEA Communities and in turn weaken the cohesive fabric of Minnesota.

Our Coalition members would have testified and apposed **SF 5065** if it had not been introduced and heard with lightning speed by Chairman Houg Hawj in the Senate Legacy Committee. The heavy handed actions of leadership have prevented our communities from gaining access to, read and study these bills and then express our opinion, after all we are the subject of the legislation and the Commemoration Event. Our communities feel strongly that the legislature has omitted the vast majority our South East Asian Communities over the years while supporting the Hmong nearly exclusively. The Hmong have enjoyed public support and funding for decades. Other Asian communities have not. Its time Minnesota shares its resources in an equitable way.

We understand another inclusive funding bill has been introduced **SF 5172** and is awaiting a hearing. We would strongly encourage the committee hearing that bill.

Governor Walz often expounds upon Minnesota as being “One Minnesota”. In our opinion and experience it is far from it.

Scott Walker
Special Projects Director
Coalition of Allied Afghan and Vietnam War Veterans
Saint Paul, MN 55102

March 26, 2024

Chair Leon Lillie
House Legacy Finance Committee
Minnesota State Office Building – Room 200
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Saint Paul, Minnesota, 55155

Chair Lillie and members of the House Legacy Finance Committee:

I respectfully submit my written testimony against HF 4996, introduced on March 18, 2024. This bill pertains to the 50-year commemoration event for the Vietnam War/Southeast Asian Conflict.

I value the importance of acknowledging the struggles and stories of those affected by the Vietnam War/Southeast Asian Conflict. However, I have reservations about the method and language employed in HF 4996. Upon a careful reading, the bill does not fully reflect the collective and individual viewpoints of the Cambodian, Hmong, Lao, and Vietnamese communities nor does it honor the varied contributions and narratives of our Southeast Asian communities' impact on the history of Minnesota.

I propose the following considerations:

- **Engage the Communities:** It is essential that these Southeast Asian communities are engaged and heard in such a significant event where their voices, experiences, and contributions are reflected. HF 4996 fails to engage effectively with the Cambodian, Hmong, Lao, and Vietnamese communities in Minnesota.
- **Representation Matters:** Boldly mention the Cambodian, Hmong, Lao, and Vietnamese communities; acknowledge and honor **all four** communities during this momentous occasion for Southeast Asians in Minnesota.
- **Inclusion is Key:** Revise the wording to be more inclusive of the Cambodian, Hmong, Lao, and Vietnamese communities. The current wording of HF 4996 falls short of this and does not reflect inclusion in these commemorative efforts. Lawmakers must ensure that all communities are included and respected in these initiatives.

In light of these concerns, I urge you to reconsider support for HF 4996 and to explore alternative approaches that prioritize inclusivity, community engagement, and accurate representation of the diverse perspectives and experiences related to the Vietnam War/Southeast Asian Conflict.

Thank you for considering my viewpoints on this matter. I am more than willing to discuss this further and provide any additional information or perspective that may be helpful in your decision-making process.

Sincerely,



Danny Khotsombath

March 26th, 2024

Chair Leon Lillie
House Legacy Finance Committee
Minnesota State Office Building – Room 200
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Saint Paul, Minnesota, 55155

Chair Lillie and members of the House Legacy Finance Committee:

My name is Cheryl Yin. I moved from California to Minnesota in August 2023 to be an Assistant Professor Anthropology at Carleton College, which is my current role. As a new Minnesota resident with Cambodian (Khmer) ancestry, I made it my mission to connect with other Khmer and Southeast Asian Minnesotans in the area. I have met so many wonderful community members who make this state vibrant. I am giving a written testimony in opposition to House File 4996.

Having witnessed the important role Khmer Minnesotans have played in the state's history in the last 40 years—many resettled here as refugees after the Khmer Rouge communist genocide in the late 1970s—I am moved by their story and resilience. I believe it is important for Khmer Americans to be part of the 50th Commemoration. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Cheryl Yin
Assistant Professor of Anthropology
Carleton College
cyin@carleton.edu

March 26th, 2024

Chair Leon Lillie
House Legacy Finance Committee
Minnesota State Office Building – Room 200
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Saint Paul, Minnesota, 55155

Chair Lillie and members of the House Legacy Finance Committee:

My name is Dae Yang, and I am a born and raised Minnesotan with roots in Hmong. I currently serve as the Office and Project coordinator of The SEAD Project, a Minnesota-based non-profit organization that believes in Southeast Asian community leadership and capacity building that recognizes and draws upon the value and opportunities of understanding our shared stories and their diversity. On behalf of the Khmer, Lao, Hmong, and Viet communities that SEAD serves and being a member of the Hmong community, I am giving a written testimony in opposition to House File 4996. I, like many other Hmong community members, have stayed close to only our community; never venturing out to support other SEA folk who have similar stories to us. Joining SEAD, it has been spiritual to connect, be with and collaborate with other SEA communities who understand the experiences the Vietnam war has brought to our people.

As someone who is directly serving a community of over 60,000 Southeast Asian refugees from Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, I've seen firsthand the extraordinary stories of their families who each beat the odds in their own way, and some who still struggle. I've had the opportunity to experience the joy and pride of each community who felt heard, seen, and honored as they told their stories while celebrating our shared history together. Our most successful community members often have a privilege of understanding their roots and heritage, their legacy and their opportunities. But there are many others who have only begun to hear the full, true stories of our elders, now that many more are opening up, feeling that it is safe to share their stories without fear of reprisal or endangering their other family members, or else who feel that there are stories too vital to be forgotten that would be integral to their children and grandchildren remembering their heritage and all that they might bring to the world as Americans. Southeast Asians are not a monolithic story. Few of our refugee stories are exactly the same, but they are stories of friendship and loss, honor and sacrifice, rebuilding and remembering. And we would not have them lost.

Few Minnesotans remember the time Vice-President Hubert Humphrey visited Laos in 1966 nearly 60 years ago, 10 years before the American bicentennial. It was the start of a special relationship between Southeast Asians and Minnesota, and our stories are forever intertwined. A history of Minnesota is incomplete without an appreciation of the Southeast Asian stories that are tied to it, from world-class restaurants and internationally recognized artists, to educators, small businesses, philanthropy, and community service. But because of the complexity of our journeys and how little has been done until recently to document it, one event, one festival or proclamation alone will be insufficient to capture this treasure and all that our fellow Minnesotans deserve to hear. By including the Lao, Khmer, Hmong, Viet, Thai communities, and our veterans as part of the 50th Commemoration who have all been impacted by the Vietnam War, it will make a key difference at a critical point before we lose the most essential stories of our elders and their descendents, and I hope that this committee recognizes and supports this opportunity to work in unity and solidarity together for one of the most important milestones.

Sincerely,



Dexieng Yang
Project + Office Coordinator

M 763.478.7186 | E dexieng@theseadproject.org

March 26, 2024

Chair Leon Lillie
House Legacy Finance Committee—200 State Office Building
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155

Chair Lillie and members of the House Legacy Finance Committee:

I respectfully submit this letter on behalf of the Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans (the Council) per my role as Chair of the Council Board. On March 21, the Board voted to take a position on the following bills:

- In **support**: H.F. XX/S.F. 5172, “a bill for an act relating to arts and culture; appropriating money to commemorate Vietnam War/Southeast Asian conflict” for Minnesota’s Cambodian, Hmong, Lao, and Vietnamese communities as well as Minnesota’s Vietnam veterans. This is our Council’s bill, drafted after conversations with leaders from our Cambodian, Hmong, Lao, and Vietnamese communities.
- In **opposition**: H.F. 4996/S.F. 5065, “a bill for an act relating to arts and cultural heritage; appropriating money to celebrate 50 years of Hmong and Southeast Asian communities in Minnesota.”

With a majority of voting Board members indicating **opposition to H.F. 4996/S.F. 5065**, the Board stands in opposition to this bill. This opposition exists for many reasons, and was expressed by both Board members as well as by community members who were present in the March 21 Board meeting:

- The Board and community members understand that H.F. 4996/S.F. 5065 were hastily composed.
- The Board and community members found the language of H.F. 4996/S.F. 5065 to be offensive and inaccurate. Titling these bills as a “celebration” misses the mark on the steep price that the veterans and victims paid, and on the onus of the bill sponsors to enact a thorough, thoughtful, community-driven observation of this solemn anniversary.
- Section 1(a) of these bills would implement a competitive grant program that our Council and community members believe would unfairly advantage one community at the significant expense of the others. The smaller Southeast Asian communities—the Cambodian, Lao, and Vietnamese—have fewer nonprofit organizations which are not as well positioned to succeed in a competitive grant program where equity isn’t clearly considered from the beginning.
- These bills ignore the vast network of state and nonprofit community partnerships that would secure the authentic participation of these smaller Southeast Asian communities. To

overlook these organizations and individuals will erode trust from the very communities these funds are meant to uplift.

As one of our legislative Board members said regarding this vote, it is important to recognize that the Council does not oppose or support measures on account of their politics—commemoration of the conclusion of the Vietnam War is not a Democratic or Republican endeavor. The Board recognizes that Democrats, Republicans, and Independents were equally drafted to fight in Southeast Asia.

The 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War is a very powerful issue for the affected communities—which is not only limited to the Southeast Asian communities whose diasporas were the direct result of the conclusion of the war, but also American-born veterans whose lives were shaped by both the events in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, as well as the risk that Cambodian, Hmong, Lao, and Vietnamese soldiers took to assist American soldiers during the war.

The Board conducted its vote on this bill because of our serious concerns that it appeared hurriedly composed. We believe that all the individuals whose lives were shattered because of the war deserve to be recognized in a joint commemoration program reflecting the magnitude of the 50th anniversary. The Council has worked for nearly a year to enact its statutory duty in advance of this weighty anniversary and envision a commemoration that uplifts and pays respect to all of those involved, because if such a thorough commemoration is not enacted in 2025, it will be too late for many of the survivors.

If there are amendments proposed in this Committee, on the House or Senate floor, or in an eventual Conference Committee, they must genuinely take into account the perspectives of all four Southeast Asian communities. The Cambodian, Lao, and Vietnamese communities deserve the respect and honor of the State of Minnesota that they do not feel is present in H.F. 4996/S.F. 5065 as introduced.

This opinion of the Board is intended to position Council staff to better steer the Council's efforts in carrying out its statutory duties. We respectfully submit this official position on H.F. 4996/S.F. 5065 to the House Legacy Finance Committee to be retained and considered in future votes.

Sincerely,



Saraswati Singh
Chair
Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans

March 26, 2024

Chair Leon Lillie
House Legacy Finance Committee
Minnesota State Office Building – Room 200
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Saint Paul, Minnesota, 55155

Chair Lillie and members of the House Legacy Finance Committee:

I am writing to provide my written testimony in opposition to House File 4996, which pertains to the 50-year commemoration event for the Vietnam War/Southeast Asian Conflict.

While I deeply appreciate the opportunity to honor the sacrifices and experiences of those impacted by the Vietnam War/Southeast Asian Conflict, I have significant concerns about the current language and approach taken with House File 4996. After thorough review and consideration, I firmly believe that the bill fails to adequately represent the diverse perspectives of the Cambodian, Hmong, Lao, and Vietnamese communities, and it does not set a precedent for an inclusive commemoration event that pays tribute to the sacrifices and experiences of our diverse Southeast Asian communities that have shaped our shared history in Minnesota.

My opposition stems from the following key points:

1. **Lack of Community Engagement:** The bill appears to lack meaningful engagement with the Cambodian, Hmong, Lao, and Vietnamese communities in Minnesota. It is crucial that a commemoration event of this significance accurately reflects the voices, experiences, and contributions of the respective Southeast Asian communities.
2. **Insufficient Representation:** The bill omits the names of the Cambodian, Lao, and Vietnamese communities. It is essential to ensure that all four communities are fully recognized, honored, and celebrated in this historic moment for Southeast Asians in the state of Minnesota.
3. **Failure to Establish Inclusivity:** The current language of the bill does not set a precedent for inclusivity in future commemorative efforts. It is the responsibility of legislators to ensure that all communities are represented and respected in initiatives of this nature.

In light of these concerns, I urge you to reconsider support for House File 4996 and to explore alternative approaches that prioritize inclusivity, community engagement, and accurate representation of the diverse perspectives and experiences related to the Vietnam War/Southeast Asian Conflict.

Thank you for considering my testimony on this matter. I am more than willing to discuss this further and provide any additional information or perspective that may be helpful in your decision-making process.

Sincerely,



Bana Soumetho

Subject: Letter in regards to the celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War regarding House File 4996 (Rep. Lee)

Dear Representative Molzahn,

I hope this letter finds you well. My name is Chinda Kim Gregor, and I am a proud Cambodian American with over 25 years of experience as an educator. I am here today to advocate for the inclusion of Southeast Asian communities, including Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, and Vietnamese, in the celebration surrounding the 50th Anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War.

The Vietnam War had a profound impact on my Cambodian community, with the Khmer Rouge regime inflicting unimaginable suffering upon our people, resulting in the loss of a quarter of the Cambodian population. As an educator, I believe it is essential to educate our students about our history, including the atrocities committed during this dark chapter.

I am here to express my support for the Legacy funds for a joint commemoration program that encompasses all Southeast Asian communities, as well as honoring Vietnam veterans who have served and died during this brutal war.

I am compelled to share my own story of fleeing the brutal killing in Cambodia with my mother after my father's life was taken from us. This war continues to have a lasting effect on many Cambodians residing in Minnesota and beyond, and our voices must be heard.

I know that the perspectives of Cambodian Americans, alongside Vietnamese, Laotian, and Hmong communities, must be heard and acknowledged in discussions surrounding the 50th Anniversary. Each community has its unique narrative that deserves recognition, and by including all parties in commemorating this milestone, we can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the war's legacy and its impact on Southeast Asian communities.

Thank you for allowing me to share my narrative on behalf of Cambodian and Southeast Asian communities. Your support in ensuring our voices are heard and our stories are remembered is greatly appreciated.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Chinda Kim Gregor".

Chinda Kim Gregor

Stephen Young
406 Wacouta St., Unit 414
St Paul, MN 55101

March 25, 2024

Chair Leon Lillie
House Legacy Finance Committee
Minnesota State Office Building – Room 200
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Saint Paul, Minnesota, 55155

Dear Representative Lillie:

I write to request an opportunity to testify on Wednesday morning in support of Representative Nash's bill titled "**50th Anniversary of Vietnam War/Southeast Asian Conflict**" to provide Legacy funds for a joint commemoration program commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War that includes our Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, Vietnamese, and U.S.-born Vietnam veterans communities.

My Father took a leading role in 1954 in committing the United States to the defense of the Vietnamese Nationalists in South Vietnam. As the Director of Southeast Asian Affairs in the State Department in October, he drafted for President Eisenhower a letter committing the United States to the defense of South Vietnam.

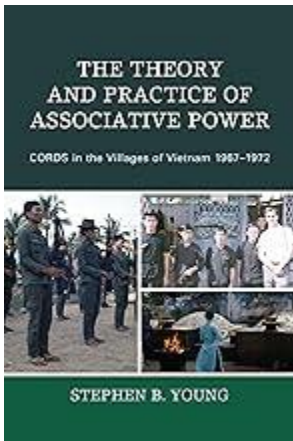
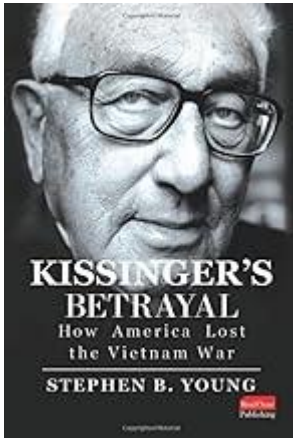
The final paragraph of that letter set forth the moral basis for American sacrifices in defense of freedom and independence for the Vietnamese nationalists, as we had done for the South Korean nationalists and the people of West Germany.

Then, in March 1975 – 49 years ago this coming Sunday actually – I and a few friends in the State Department and National Security Council – started the refugee resettlement program which brought all the refugees from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia to Minnesota and other states.

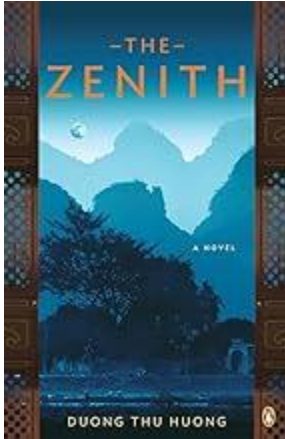
I served with the very successful CORDS program of village self-governance, self-development and self-defense in South Vietnam, was warmly welcomed by the Tan Dai Viet Party of Vietnamese nationalists, and, after the war, was personal political advisor to Hmong General Vang Pao for more than 20 years.

I doubt if anyone in Minnesota today can speak with more personal knowledge of the Vietnam War than I can. My most recent book, *Kissinger's Betrayal: How America Lost the Vietnam War* reveals for the first time to the American people the documents which confirm that in 1971 Henry Kissinger, then National Security Advisor to President Nixon, decided on his own to abandon the South Vietnamese.

My books about the war available on Amazon are:



And translated with my wife Hoa P. Young



I can answer any question members might have about the morality and historical justification for such recognition of those who served and those who suffered, both here at home and among our allies – and the innocents in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia who were victimized by illegal aggression and intolerant oppression.

Sincerely yours,

Steph B Young

Stephen B. Young
651 336 4812
sbymn@msn.com

March 25, 2024

Chair Leon Lillie
House Legacy Finance Committee:
Minnesota State Office Building – Room 200
600 Cedar Street
Saint Paul, Minnesota, 55101

Dear Chair Lillie and members of the House Legacy Finance Committee:

This letter is in opposition to the language in House File 4996. The proposed bill highlights the Hmong community and fails to recognize all the other Southeast Asian communities. Acknowledgment for the bravery, integrity, and struggle that the other Southeast Asian communities went through should be a shared honor. Hmong, Vietnamese, Laotian, and Cambodian people should all reap the rewards due to the sacrifice which was made to stand up for human life. These are not mere words that are insignificant but depict an accurate picture of all those who fled for freedom and landed in Minnesota. To project a true sense of the Southeast Asian community, the bill should have language that does not misrepresent the people it was written to celebrate.

Hmong, Vietnamese, Laotian, and Cambodian people made sacrifices. The bill in its current status denotes an ethnocentric tone, only highlighting the Hmong community. This tone creates division and not unity which depletes the integrity of all people. A bill of this magnitude should recognize Vietnamese, Hmong, Laotian and Cambodians. I write to you today to ensure all communities in the Southeast Asian arena who work, contribute, live, raise families and create a sense of diversity in Minnesota are represented in this bill.

Sincerely,

Phouthaivanh Wilkerson



1007 West Broadway Avenue, Minneapolis, MN 55411 | www.theseadproject.org

March 25th, 2024

Chair Leon Lillie
House Legacy Finance Committee
Minnesota State Office Building – Room 200
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Saint Paul, Minnesota, 55155

Chair Lillie and members of the House Legacy Finance Committee:

My name is Kaysone Syonesa, and I am a Minnesotan with roots in Laos, and currently serve as the Co-Executive Director of The SEAD Project, a Minnesota-based non-profit organization that believes in Southeast Asian community leadership and capacity building that recognizes and draws upon the value and opportunities of understanding our shared stories and their diversity. On behalf of the Khmer, Lao, Hmong, and Viet communities that SEAD serves and being a member of the Lao community, I am giving a written testimony in opposition to House File 4996. I came to America with my family as a refugee when I was a child. My future was uncertain: Fewer than 13% of Lao, Cambodians and Hmong successfully graduated college between 1990-2010, but I was one the few who was able to beat the odds and became a successful artist, entrepreneur, and community leader who graduated from the University of Minnesota.

As someone who is directly serving a community of over 60,000 Southeast Asian refugees from Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, I've seen firsthand the extraordinary stories of their families who each beat the odds in their own way, and some who still struggle. I've had the opportunity to experience the joy and pride of each community who felt heard, seen, and honored as they told their stories while celebrating our shared history together. Our most successful community members often have a privilege of understanding their roots and heritage, their legacy and their opportunities. But there are many others who have only begun to hear the full, true stories of our elders, now that many more are opening up, feeling that it is safe to share their stories without fear of reprisal or endangering their other family members, or else who feel that there are stories too vital to be forgotten that would be integral to their children and grandchildren remembering their heritage and all that they might bring to the world as Americans. Southeast Asians are not a monolithic story. Few of our refugee stories are exactly the same, but they are stories of friendship and loss, honor and sacrifice, rebuilding and remembering. And we would not have them lost.

Few Minnesotans remember the time Vice-President Hubert Humphrey visited Laos in 1966 nearly 60 years ago, 10 years before the American bicentennial. It was the start of a special relationship between Southeast Asians and Minnesota, and our stories are forever intertwined. A history of Minnesota is incomplete without an appreciation of the Southeast Asian stories that are tied to it, from world-class restaurants and internationally recognized artists, to educators, small businesses, philanthropy, and community service. But because of the complexity of our journeys and how little has been done until recently to document it, one event, one festival or proclamation alone will be insufficient to capture this treasure and all that our fellow Minnesotans deserve to hear. By including the Lao, Khmer, Hmong, Viet, Thai communities, and our veterans as part of the 50th Commemoration who have all been impacted by the Vietnam War, it will make a key difference at a critical point before we lose the most essential stories of our elders and their descendents, and I hope that this committee recognizes and supports this opportunity to work in unity and solidarity together for one of the most important milestones.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kaysone Syonesa', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Kaysone Syonesa

Co-Executive Director

M 763.600.2706 | E kaysone@theseadproject.org

Souri Meleena Kruschke
10520 106th Ave N
Hanover, MN 55341

March 26th, 2024

Chair Leon Lillie
House Legacy Finance Committee
Minnesota State Office Building – Room 200
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Saint Paul, Minnesota, 55155

Dear Chair Lillie and members of the House Legacy Finance Committee:

I, Souri Meleena Kruschke on behalf of the Lao Community of Minnesota submit this letter in opposition to House File 4996.

My primary objective is to ensure the passage of this bill while also allowing our voices to be heard. It's crucial to recognize that the implications of this bill extend beyond just the Hmong community. It also impacts the larger Southeast Asian (SEA) community.

As someone of Lao descent and a Vietnam War refugee, this issue resonates deeply with me because my grandfather served in the war, I've observed the profound and lasting effects of my parents' journey immigrating to the U.S., which involved leaving behind their entire lives to begin anew. They faced the challenges of learning a new language and adjusting to a different culture, all while forging a path for our family's future. As a child at the time, I could only watch, unable to contribute. Now, as an adult, I recognize the power of my voice and the responsibility to speak for those in my community who may not have the opportunity to do so.

While I wholeheartedly support Representative Nash's bill titled "50th Anniversary of Vietnam War/Southeast Asian Conflict" I respectfully urge the council to propose a modification to encompass the entire Asian community, as we were significantly impacted. If we were to submit our own bill, it would be identical to the current one, with the sole difference being its inclusion of all Asian communities affected.

Thank you for considering my testimony on this important matter. I am available to provide further information and clarification if needed. Please feel free to contact me at 763-300-0667.

Sincerely,



Souri Meleena Kruschke

CAAVWV
Coalition of Allied Afghan & Vietnam War Veterans
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102



March 25, 2024

Chairman Leon Lillie
House Legacy Finance Committee
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Saint Paul, MN 55155

On behalf of the Coalition of Allied Afghan and Vietnam War Veterans we would like to strongly oppose the passage of HF 4996 in total or in an amended form. This legislation is totally unfair to those communities who fought alongside the United States Military during the Vietnam Conflict. This proposed funding for a Commemorative Event of the 50th Anniversary of the ending of the Vietnam Conflict is unacceptable to our communities and is likely to get little if any participation from them.

Our Coalition has from its inception has attempted and been quite successful frankly in uniting communities. Our unity is stressed when legislation such as this is introduced and passed enriching one community over others. Dividing communities in such a way by offering money to one community and not others or weighting the access to one over another only weaken or SEA Communities and in turn weaken the cohesive fabric of Minnesota.

Our Coalition members would have testified and apposed SF 5172 if it had not been introduced and heard with lightning speed by Chairman Houg Hawj in the Senate Legacy Committee. The heavy handed actions of leadership have prevented our communities from gaining access to, read and study these bills and then express our opinion, after all we are the subject of the legislation and the Commemoration Event. Our communities feel strongly that the legislature has omitted the vast majority our South East Asian Communities over the years while supporting the Hmong nearly exclusively. The Hmong have enjoyed public support and funding for decades. Other Asian communities have not. Its time Minnesota shares its resources in an equitable way.

We understand another inclusive funding bill has been introduced and is awaiting a hearing. We would strongly encourage the committee hearing that bill.

Governor Walz often expounds upon Minnesota as being “One Minnesota”. In our opinion and experience it is far from it.

Scott Walker
Special Projects Director
Coalition of Allied Afghan and Vietnam War Veterans
Saint Paul, MN 55102