

Joint Ways and Means, General Government Committee
March 11, 2013

Testimony on Funding for the Oregon Advocacy Commissions Office

Chairs and Members of the Committee

My name is Joseph Santos-Lyons, and I am providing this letter of support in my capacity as Executive Director of the Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon. APANO is a statewide civic engagement and policy advocacy organization. Our mission is unite Asians and Pacific Islanders to achieve social justice. We use our collective strengths to advance equity through empowering, organizing and advocating with our communities.

APANO urges your continued support of the budget for the Oregon Advocacy Commissions. Each commission provides a critical governmental service in linking communities of color and women to the Executive and Legislative branches of the State of Oregon.

Oregon has approximately 200,000 persons of Asian and/or Pacific Islander decent, including persons who identify as multiracial. This is over 5% of Oregon's population. Our community is increasingly diverse, and representing 50 different racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and over 100 distinct languages. We face growing challenges as disparities in education, health outcomes, economic opportunity, and racial discrimination persist.

Contrary to popular belief that Asian and Pacific Islander communities are well educated and doing well, this picture does not fit significant parts of our community. According to a recent report, "Communities of Color of Multnomah County: An Unsettling Profile" by the Coalition of Communities of Color, nearly 25% of our students have not graduated from High School compared to about 7% of white students. Similarly, Asian and Pacific Islanders have lower incomes compared to their white counterparts. Among most recent residents to arrive in Oregon came from Burma, Thailand, and Bhutan as refugees under dire circumstances with very little personal resources. They are faced with resettlement in a new country and culture at a time when jobs are scarce and services are limited. In the area of civic engagement, an indicator of community wellbeing, Asian and Pacific Islanders don't fare so well. Asian Pacific Islander Vote (APIVote) reported that 49% of eligible voters participated in the 2008 national elections compared to over 80% of white voters.



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Oregon Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs has an important role in surfacing the issues that impact Asian and Pacific Islander communities and to facilitate the education and networking that allow for greater civic engagement so that our ideas and concerns can be addressed.

APANO, and a number of local and statewide Asian and Pacific Islander organizations, have partnered with the Commission on Asian Affairs on several key projects that address our communities needs. We worked together closely in 2012 to ensure Asian Pacific American voters had access to nonpartisan candidate and ballot measure information, including publishing a more comprehensive voter guide in the Asian Reporter. We formed a coalition along with the Oregon Asian Pacific American Bar Association to educate community leaders about their voting rights and increase voter registration. This year we have continued our partnership for the Asian Pacific American Legislative Day, strengthening our community's ability to understand the legislative process, meet their legislators, and analyze bills that have an impact on our communities.

Please support full funding for the Oregon Advocacy Commissions. Oregon Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs provides a crucial link in facilitating citizen involvement in the workings of state government.

Thank you for this opportunity to present this testimony.

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