



EAST SIDE FREEDOM LIBRARY

1105 Greenbrier Street

St. Paul, MN 55106

March 10, 2021

Capital Investment Committee
Minnesota House of Representatives

Dear Rep. Fue Lee, Mary Murphy, and Colleagues:

The East Side Freedom Library team is excited to hear that the Asian American Center for Media and the Arts might secure funding from the state legislature. This would be a wonderful development for our organization and our community.

As an organization deeply rooted in the East Side, we know how diverse our community is and how significant Asian Americans are to our economic, political and economic life. As partners with the Hmong Archives, we see our Hmong and Hmong-American neighbors, particularly their children, seek access to their history and to representatives of themselves that honor their experiences rather than subject them to demeaning stereotypes. We also see the interest that our Karen, Bhutanese, Lao, Vietnamese, and Tibetan neighbors manifest in learning

Hmong history and stories. Indeed, education and learning provide a great foundation for the bridges between and among these communities.

We also know that art and culture are fundamental to the construction and maintenance of these bridges. Over the past seven years, the East Side Freedom Library has been fortunate to collaborate with many of the women who are leading the Asian American Center for Media and the Arts. We have hosted performances of May Lee-Yang's *Confessions of a Lazy Hmong Woman* and book events with Saymoukda Vongsay, as well as poetry readings with Mai Der Vang, Tou SaiK Lee, a photography exhibit by Pao Her, and book events with Hmong Educational Resources, Inc., involving high school students and scholars. We have great respect for the organizers of the AACMA and for the richness of the cultural work being produced by our Asian American neighbors.

Despite its richness, however, this work receives far too little attention in our mainstream cultural institutions and platforms. Our white, African American, Latinx, and African neighbors have much to learn from our Asian American neighbors, and the establishment of an Asian American Center for Media and the Arts would serve all of these communities. We would learn more about our neighbors and we would engage models for how we might use art and culture to tell our own stories, too.

This project will benefit all of us. We urge you to support it.

Love and Solidarity,

Peter J. Rachleff, Ph.D.

Co-Executive Director