



March 16, 2017

Madam Chair S. Anderson
State Government Finance Committee
Room 10, State Office Building
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Honorable Madam Chair and Members of the Committee,

The Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans (“the Council”) submits this letter in **strong support of House File (H.F.) 127**, the request for \$650,000 in state funds to support a key component of the “Vietnam: Minnesota Remembers” project, the Digital Story Wall. We at the Council, the state agency charged with advising legislators on behalf of Minnesotans of Asian and Pacific descent, are humbled to lend our support to H.F. 127.

This project will honor and tell the stories of Minnesotans during the Vietnam era, including the Hmong. The Council believes this project will be invaluable to Minnesotans, especially our largest Asian Minnesotan community, the Hmong, for a number of reasons. First, Minnesota is home to an estimated 90,000 strong Hmong community, also identified as the second largest in the nation, and the largest urban concentration in the United States. Second, the elders of this community played a front-and-center role in the so-called Secret War in Laos. When the Americans withdrew in 1975, the Hmong were persecuted. Families fled to Thailand, and many were killed on their way through the jungles or in the dangerous crossing of the Mekong River.

The Digital Story Wall will make accessible to Americans, for many years to come, the experiences of Minnesotans who served in the conflict in Southeast Asia. Most Minnesotans crossed the ocean to serve, while the Hmong served in their home country because they believed in the mission of the United States. The Hmong were not aware of the political turmoil in the United States, they only knew that they believed in the values of America as they saw them in Laos.

The Hmong that arrived in Minnesota in the 1970s and 1980s were grief-stricken, traumatized, and disoriented refugees who learned promptly – in spite of linguistic and cultural barriers – that America was undecided about whether or not the newly arrived refugees were its allies, and deserved support and acceptance. As the generation who fought and supported the Americans in Laos continues to age and die, this project will help them know that their sacrifices were not in vain. For their children and grandchildren, this project will be an instructive lesson in their cultural history – both of their cultures, the Hmong and the American.

This project is designed to do what art at its best does – comfort the afflicted, and afflict the comfortable. I am reminded of the first time that I saw the movie, *Saving Private Ryan*, released in the 40th anniversary of the D-Day conflict. For those of the World War II generation, the movie served to provide comfort as it showed the heroism of the American soldiers. For those younger, they were afflicted by the trauma and intensity of the story. The fact that it was technically a work of fiction did not diminish the power of the story.

Vietnam: Minnesota Remembers will serve as a means of uniting all of us as Minnesotans, as Americans, as “Out of Many, One.” On behalf of the Council, I encourage you to support the passage of H.F. 127. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Sia Her
Executive Director