



February 27, 2008

The Honorable Arnold Schwarzenegger  
State Capitol Building  
Sacramento, Ca 95814  
Fax: 916-558-3160

CC: Fabian Núñez, State Assembly Speaker  
Don Perata, State Senate President Pro Tem  
Denise Ducheny, Chair of Senate Budget and Fiscal Review  
John Laird, Chair of the Assembly Committee on Budget

Dear Governor Schwarzenegger,

We, the undersigned community organizations representing the interests of Southeast Asian American communities in California, are writing to urge you to consider our concerns regarding your 2008-2009 state budget proposals. According to the 2000 Census, Southeast Asian Americans number over 700,000 in California, making California home to the highest population of Southeast Asian Americans in the country<sup>1</sup>. The proposed 2008-2009 budget cuts to state health, senior services and language access programs will have severe ramifications for this population, one of the most poverty stricken in the state.

Under your proposal for the 2008-2009 budget, low-income families, elders, children and the disabled are the most negatively impacted in an attempt to alleviate California's \$16 billion deficit. The endangerments of the following state programs are of particular concern to Southeast Asian Americans in California:

- ⊕ **The Dymally-Alatorre Bilingual Services Act:** Multilingual services are crucial to the Southeast Asian American community with 62% of Vietnamese, 61% of Hmong, 56% of Cambodian and 55% of Laotian being Limited English Proficient (LEP), in addition to 3/4 of Southeast Asian American elders who self identify as speaking English "not well" or "not at all"<sup>2</sup>. This law mandates that State agencies employ a sufficient number of qualified personnel to reflect the needs of LEP clients and to ensure the accuracy of

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<sup>1</sup> Southeast Asia Resource Action Center, *Southeast Asian American Statistical Profile*

<sup>2</sup> Southeast Asia Resource Action Center, *Southeast Asian American Elders in California*

information being distributed verbally or by written communication. The elimination of personnel and reduction of expenditures used to contact state agencies will negatively impact the quality of implementation of this law.

- # **California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKS):** Southeast Asian Americans are among the most poverty stricken in the state with 53% of Hmong, 40% of Cambodian, 32% of Laotian and 18% of Vietnamese living in poverty<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, over 21,000 Southeast Asian American families are enrolled in the CalWORKS program<sup>4</sup>. A reduction in funding would mean that these families will fall deeper into poverty.
- # **Healthy Families Program:** The proposed cuts to this program will limit access to affordable healthcare for the children of the 4,000 Southeast Asian American working families who are enrolled in this program<sup>5</sup>. Healthcare providers will no longer be provided incentives for their services which will result in patients having to incur out-of-pocket expenses to pay for higher co-payments as well as for additional healthcare.
- # **Medi-Cal Program:** The proposal calls for additional cuts in Medi-Cal Provider rates and an elimination of Medi-Cal benefits such as dental, vision, and acupuncture which will significantly impact the 200,000 Southeast Asian American families enrolled in the program<sup>6</sup> and further widen health disparities. Furthermore, a reduction in state payments to Medi-Cal providers will reduce the number of patients who are able to afford and access their health care services, ultimately leading to unhealthy communities.
- # **Supplemental Security Income/State Supplementary Payment (SSI/SSP) Program:** The elderly Southeast Asian American population is one of the most vulnerable populations and the proposal to suspend state Cost of Living Adjustments (COLA) for SSI recipients will prove to be detrimental to the sizeable Southeast Asian American population who rely on SSI benefits in California including 9.7% of Laotians, 9% of Hmong, 8% of Cambodians and 7.4% of Vietnamese<sup>7</sup>.
- # **In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) Program:** The proposal to reduce overall funding for this program by 10% will jeopardize the health and well being of the elderly and disabled who need care in their homes. Nationally, disability rates among Southeast Asian American elders are disproportionately high with 71% of Hmong, 68% of Cambodians, 63% of Laotians and 58% of Vietnamese considered to be disabled in some way. Furthermore, over 90% of Southeast Asian Americans living in the U.S., who are 65 and over, live in family households<sup>8</sup>. A reduction in IHSS funds will create additional financial burdens on these families caring for their elders.

In conclusion, we urge you to protect these critical services and consider the implications of your current proposed budget cuts as you make further decisions regarding the 2008-2009 California state budget and beyond.

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<sup>3</sup> Asian Pacific American Legal Center, *The Diverse Face of Asians and Pacific Islanders in California*

<sup>4</sup> California Department of Social Services, *Federal Fiscal Year 2003 CalWORKS Characteristics Survey*

<sup>5</sup> California Department of Health and Human Services, *Healthy Families September 2006 Report*

<sup>6</sup> California Department of Healthcare Services, *Medi-Cal January 2007 Report*

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Social Security Administration, <http://www.ssa.gov/pubs/11125.html>

<sup>8</sup> Southeast Asia Resource Action Center, *Southeast Asian American Elders in California*

If you have any questions or for clarifications, please do not hesitate to contact Catherina Nou, California Policy Advocate at the Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC), through e-mail at [cat@searac.org](mailto:cat@searac.org) or (916) 428-7444. Thank you and we sincerely appreciate your leadership.

Sincerely,

Catherina Nou, California Policy Advocate  
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)

On Behalf of: