

THE Hmong INSTITUTE

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January 27, 2021

Dear Cultural Community Committee,

Thank you for your hard work in making sure that services provided from the city is culturally relevant and competent for the diverse populations in Madison! I am writing regarding agenda item: 63846.

Since the pandemic, we have been doing what we could to address the financial stress of the Southeast Asian, Tibetan and other low-income-refugee families during this pandemic. The financial stress of job loss and reduced hours led to the loss of housing, lack of food to feed their families, mental and emotional anxieties, and eviction anxieties. In April or May, the first round of COVID relief fund from the city was allocated to underserved communities, which is great! However, we were excluded even though we met the criteria (existing grantee) and did not receive support from the city. Earlier in December, we were consulted whether or not we have capacity to provide eviction prevention services, which we were relief and said, "yes." Later, we learned that it was going to be issued through an RFP when asked. So, we waited. We were happy to see the COVID RFP came out with a January 26, 2021 due date. However, as we were writing our proposal, we learned from the CAP TIMES that this fund (\$750K) had been committed to many African and Latino agencies. And only one SEA serving agency received the fund. This is inequitable allocation of funds among the underserved communities and agencies.

Tonight, you will be updated on the COVID RFP. Therefore, I am writing to ask for COVID Relief funds consideration to support the 85 families and many more out there. It is frustrating enough in dealing with the pandemic, but having to constantly advocate for equitable services is unacceptable. We understand that our community is smaller than our fellow African or Latino, but our community also deserve equitable services. As our fellow African and Latino community has over four agencies to serve them, at minimum, our SEA, Tibetan and other refugees should have 2-3 agencies to serve them too. Our frustration is about the practice of fairness, equitable resource, and transparency in funding allocation. In trying to understand the COVID Relief funding process, there seems to be two different directions—an RFP competitive process publicly announced and a pick and choose process behind closed door. When asked of the pick and choose process, we were told the COVID Relief is allocated to existing city grantees. If this is the criteria, please help us understand why we were excluded in this second round or the first round of COVID relief funds?

We are doing our best to help Madison maintain healthy and strong communities. The people we served are citizens of Madison too, especially during this pandemic. Since April, the The Hmong Institute distributed over 190,600 pounds of food to 350 families or 2100 individuals to combat the financial struggles of SEA, Tibetan and other low-income-refugee families. We provided over 1000 hours of psycho-education to help calm families during this pandemic. Currently, we serve over 85 families besides the 350 families receiving foods. There are families who are doubling up with extended families, families who are about to lose their housing, and it is very difficult to tell these families to practice social distance when they need roofs over their heads, especially children.

Thank you for your time and leadership in advocating for equitable fund allocation, transparency and fairness in the allocation of COVID relief funds so we all can combat the COVID pandemic together. You may email me at maizong.vue@theHmongInstitute.org or contact me at 608-695-4041.

Sincerely,



Mai Zong Vue
Board President

Mission: Empowering community through educating, preserving, and promoting the Hmong heritage.

Vision: To be the prominent leader in Hmong heritage.