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February 11, 2019

Dear Finance Committee of the City Council of Madison:

My name is Mai Zong Vue. I am writing to support the current resolution to give \$115k to Anesis Therapy for providing culturally competent services for elders at Hmoob Kaj Siab. We are not asking the elders to speak tonight because we do not want to subject them to more trauma. It is not because we do not have elders at Hmoob Kaj Siab, but because we honor and respect them and know they deserve better.

Tonight, I will not stand before you with a heavy heart and for many reasons. I would like to introduce myself before I share the reasons for not attending.

**Staff:**

Peng Her, MS  
CEO

**Consultants & Volunteers**

Mai Ger Thao, M.ED  
Hmong Language and Culture  
Enrichment Program Director

Xa Xiong, MD  
Health Summit Instructor

Alyssa Vang, Pys.D, LP  
Health Summit Instructor

Kajua Lor, Pharm D, BCACP  
Health Summit Instructor

Dia Cha, PhD  
Health Summit Instructor

Nengher Vang, PhD  
Hmong American Community  
Certificate Instructor

MayHoua Moua, MS  
Hmong American Community  
Certificate Instructor

Thai Vue  
Hmong American Community  
Certificate Instructor

**MY STORY**

I am a proud citizen of Madison and have been in Madison since 1992. Like many UW-Alumni, Madison has become my home after graduation. I came to America as a teenager in 1980. After two weeks living with our sponsors in Illinois, my family and I relocated to join family members in Wisconsin. I was raised to give honor for my family and to build a community wherever I live. I was taught to let others praise my accomplishments by letting my hard work speak for itself. I am a community advocate who builds bridges wherever I live and whoever I engage with.

My leadership style is not responding to nor attacking someone or an agency so that I can win your support or be heard. I preserve the values of integrity and reputation of my Hmong and non-Hmong communities—I am about building and strengthening community. In the last three decades of my life as a refugee, a citizen of Wisconsin and America, and now a volunteer community advocate, I only know how to build communities because I want to give back for the support I have received.

Therefore, it is a bittersweet experience writing this letter to highlight my community work and accomplishments and to share my experience about the efforts of sustaining and rebuilding a new home-away-from-home for the Hmong, Laotian, and Khmer elders at Hmoob Kaj Siab (formerly

known as Kajsiab House). It is with a heavy heart that I write and explain my personal experience in this community effort. Despite having to endure three months of incorrect information about me, I feel that it would be unfair for you not to hear from my perspective, for you will not be able to make an informed decision about whether or not to support the resolution to give \$115k to Anesis Therapy, especially the need to make a decision that is focused on the elders.

**QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

As you listen and make your decision tonight, please remember that tonight should be about the elders and not those who feel entitled to the elders and the funding. Your decision tonight should center on these questions:

1. **The fairness of an RFP is for who?** In my view, fairness for an RFP is NOT for the elders, but for transparency within the bureaucratic-institutional process of the City. This is not fairness to the elders. The RFP will not focus on the well-being of the elders, but will prolong the re-traumatization and stress of the elders for months to come as you let this issue drag on. How many more times do you want these elders tonight to fight a battle that is not theirs?
2. **Why did Journey close Kajsib House down in the first place? Is it truly the loss of MTM funds or are there other chronic issues that led to the final straw of MTM?** I believe County Board Supervisor Jamie Kuhn held some answers, if not most, to this question after her investigation. She was able to put a stop to the allegations against me and Peng, and moved forward to focus on the elders. Because of Supervisor Kuhn's diligent work to find the answers to these questions, as you know, in 2019 and for the next five years, the County is currently supporting Hmoob Kaj Siab by taking the lead in providing culturally competent mental health services for our the Hmong, Laotian, and Khmer elders by giving \$460k of MA crisis and \$50k of GPR for Anesis Therapy and the Hmong Institute.
3. **Is it be cost effective for the City to support the County's effort to develop a stronger and more comprehensive program at Hmoob Kaj Siab?** I believe the city staff and leadership recognize the importance of putting the elders as their priority and to ensure that a Hmoob Kaj Siab is able to serve the elders with trained bilingual bicultural staff, for the resolution on your hand to be voted on would not exist.
4. **How do you get more services for the \$115k?** One way for sure is to supplement the work of the County, if you want to be cost effective. City funding is not enough to sustain a full program but to support and compliment the County fund of more than half million dollars. Collaboration between the City and County means cost effectiveness in our effort to build a stronger program and city-community. The RFP process will continue to promote the division within both communities, not allowing the gradual healing to grow to its fullest.
5. **Is Doua entitled to have Kajsib House because he was the program manager at Kajsib House for 18 years?** Others will argue tonight that "Doua is Kajsib" and therefore the funds should go to SEA Healing Center. In my view, Doua was hired as an employee of Journey to manage Kajsib House when we started Kajsib House in 2000 from my former life at the State Refugee Office. Many do not know that I supported and played a role in the establishment of Kajsib House and have been a supporter for the past 18 years. It aches my heart to see some elders being viewed as prizes to be won, not human beings to be treated with respect, dignity, and honor.
6. **When did the community effort sour? Why did Doua resign from Anesis Therapy to create his own agency, the Southeast Healing Center?** The initial plan was to find a fiscal agent who was licensed and an approved CCS provider to provide the clinical supervision for three bilingual staff, which Anesis Therapy agreed to be our fiscal agent. A meeting was held with all KajSiab House staff to discuss who would be paid through the gap funds raised and who would volunteer until CCS reimbursement kicks in to allow eventual employment. All staff agreed and supported the four paid staff. Doua outlined how many hours he would work and how much he and the other three staff should get paid.

Once Kajsib House was closed and Hmoob Kaj Siab started at Catholic Multicultural Center (CMC), feelings of entitlement began to surface by Doua as he asked for control of the gap funds raised. Although the \$80k of city and county funds have not come in except for some private funds, the issue of "[t]hese money belong to us, it is our money, staff hiring disagreement, etc." grew bigger in the days ahead.

To be accountable to our funders and donors, Peng and I would not give in to allow Doua full control of the incoming funds per Doua's request to hire his team back. This disagreement led to the beginning of a sour

relationship. We disagreed for two reasons: 1) I would like to ensure there is accountability to the gap funds raised; and 2) I would like to make sure the gap funds are meeting our identified goals, which is sustaining mental health services for the elders rather than spending it all and then returning to ask you for more funding at the end of December. I disagreed based on my 20 years of community development experience. Hmoob Kaj Siab would not exist or be able to grow if we did not use the gap funds wisely as planned. As a result, Doua resigned from Anesis Therapay on October 16, 2018, and started a new agency, Southeast Asian Healing Center.

We did not ask Doua to stop coming to CMC even after he resigned from Anesis Therapy because we felt the elders needed a familiar face as they adjusted to a new location. The transition itself is difficult enough for the elders. Behind the scene, Doua and his team lobbied hard with city and county staff for funds for their new agency, which they have every right to do so. Having options for elders to choose is a good thing. However, things got more hostile after Doua inappropriately terminated a kitchen staff when he was no longer employed by Anesis Therapy. We had no choice but to ask Doua not to return to CMC. As a result, unimaginable things happened to the many elders as I would learn a few days later through a meeting with city and county staff at CMC.

We are still a community, but with two agencies. One difference is that Hmoob Kaj Siab is equipped with trained bilingual bicultural staff and is providing culturally competent mental health services to the elders. Hmoob Kaj Siab is now at Life Center Church in order to improve services for the elders. I believe that when the dust settled down, elders who are not choosing side will gradually return for service, improved services awaiting them.

#### **MY REASON WHY I CONTINUE TO SUPPORT HMONG KAJSIAB**

My involvement in this issue is to find gap funding to help sustain and improve mental health services, and never to take over as alleged. However, after Doua resigned from Anesis Therapy to start his own agency, I continued to do what I do well--building a community by developing a stronger and more competent team of bilingual clinicians to serve the Hmong, Laotian, and Khmer elders. I cannot wait until the day when we raise enough funds to hire a program manager so I can focus my energy elsewhere. These elders deserve more.

My community work speaks for itself as a community leader. My reputation in the community stands firm for the Hmong community. When people hear the name Mai Zong Vue, they remember and praise me for my hard work in the community.

#### **MY REQUEST OF YOU TONIGHT**

Tonight, you, members of the Finance Committee, have the power to put out the fire and let the elders begin to heal and not prolong the re-traumatization of the elders. An RFP is a bureaucratic structure to protect the perception of fairness for agencies interested in the funds, not the focus of serving the elders and allowing the elders to begin to heal from this unfortunate situation that we are in.

Tonight, I ask for your support to end this unpleasant experience for the elders. Elders should be able to freely pick and choose to go to either Hmoob Kaj Siab or the Healing Center, or both. They can make their choices based on the support and types of services they need. Most importantly, elders deserve our love and respect. Is your priority to preserve fairness for the agency fighting for your funds or is it the well-being of the elders who are quietly hoping and praying that this drama to end so that they can continue to heal and choose to go wherever they feel is right for them?

Thank you for the time to serve the citizens of Madison!

Peace,

Mai Zong Vue

President, The Hmong Institute