

Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs for the District of Columbia
Committee on Housing & Community Development
Written Remarks
May 6, 2015

The Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs respectfully submits the following written remarks to the Committee on Housing & Community Development (“Committee”) to address the scheduled hearing on FY2016 Budget Oversight.

The establishment of the District of Columbia’s Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs (“Commission”) is to advise the Mayor, the Council, the Director of the Office on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs, and the public on the views and needs of the Asian American and Pacific Islander (“AAPI”) communities in the District of Columbia. The Commission works closely with the Office on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs (“OAPIA”) to support its efforts to achieve success for the AAPI community through advocacy, community engagement, intergovernmental affairs, and policy and research.

OAPIA is a vital asset to the District’s AAPI community. The Mayor’s budget proposal appropriately recognizes that the OAPIA provides a “diverse range of services that are critical to ensure the District delivers equal access to its programs and services for District AAPI residents and merchants.” Therefore, the Commission wants to ensure that OAPIA continues to receive the financial support it needs to provide invaluable services and assistance to the District’s AAPI communities.

The commission is concerned with the Mayor’s proposed budget for FY2016. In general, the operating budget for the OAPIA has decreased since FY2014. In FY2015, OAPIA’s budget decreased by 9.9% and the Mayor is proposing another decrease of 11.5% for FY2016. These decreases remain a huge concern should the Mayor continue to follow this trend throughout her term.

In addition, the Commission would like to address some key areas of concern.

First, Outreach and Education are valuable programs that are conducted by OAPIA. They involve outreach, case assistance, educational workshops, and cultural events for the District’s AAPI residents and merchants, as noted in the Mayor’s budget

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proposal for OAPIA. However, according to the Mayor's proposed budget, outreach and education appears to reflect a substantial decrease from the approved FY2015 budget to the FY2016 proposed budget (\$602,000 to \$483,000). As key performance indicators show, there was an increase in outreach efforts to AAPI community members and residents, which require financial support and stability for these continued outreach/educational programs. Therefore, the proposed decreased budget may contribute to a decline in outreach services and educational programming for the District's AAPI community and merchants.

Second, we understand that there was a reduction of \$120,000 to account for the removal of a one-time funding appropriated in FY2015 to support domestic violence intervention programs and "other services." However, Community Based Organizations like the Asian/Pacific Islander Domestic Violence Resource Project, a non-profit in Washington, D.C., whose mission is to address, prevent and end domestic violence and sexual assault in Asian/Pacific Islander communities are important services for our District AAPI residents, in addition to the "other services" that the Mayor alludes to in her proposed plan. This is why it is important that the Mayor maintains OAPIA's budget and grant-making capacity and the need for continued funding for programs and services that achieve OAPIA's mission to improve the quality of life of AAPI residents and grow and preserve the middle class, an objective that is also in line with the Mayor's goals.

Third, AAPI-serving organizations rely on OAPIA grant support and capacity-building assistance like Asian American LEAD, a non-profit in Washington, D.C., that supports low-income and underserved AAPI youth with educational empowerment, identity development, and leadership opportunities through after school, summer, and mentoring programs. Without OAPIA grant-making support, our population's needs may not be adequately addressed.

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Fourth, OAPIA is a critical voice for meeting the needs of AAPIs in the District. As a minority population with comparatively smaller numbers, we need OAPIA to make our needs visible and assist District agencies to build their capacity to provide culturally and linguistically competent services. And, as a result, this may require an increase in the hiring of Asian language bilingual staff for the positions with major public contracts (e.g., health and human services, public schools, housing, and police). Moreover, in light of the most recent events that occurred in Baltimore, language access, security, and social services become a vital component to a community like our AAPI District residents. For example, OAPIA picks up many first responder needs due to a lack of bilingual officers and social workers in the District. Therefore, the diversity of language access that OAPIA represents in a language access abiding District is important.

On behalf of the AAPI Community, the Commission submits its concerns and insights to the Committee regarding the Mayor's budget proposal for FY2016 and welcomes the continued support of OAPIA and the District's AAPI residents from Chairperson Anita Bonds and this Committee. Thank you for providing us this opportunity submit these written remarks.

Members of the DC Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs

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