

March 25, 2025

Chair McDonald
House Legacy Finance Committee
Minnesota State Capitol, Room G3
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Honorable Chair McDonald and Members of the Committee:

On behalf our Cambodian, Lao, and Vietnamese ancestry communities, we submit this letter in strong support of **H.F. 1440** (Nash), the request for \$500,000 in Legacy funds to support our communities' 50th anniversary commemoration programs. If passed, **H.F. 1440** would represent the first time that our state of Minnesota recognizes and honors these communities for their contributions during the Vietnam War and since. We, too, began arriving in Minnesota post-1975 because of our active role in supporting the United States' fight against the spread of communism in Southeast Asia.

As community leaders, we see that **H.F. 1440** is crucial and, although late, now is better than tomorrow, or given the age of veterans, never. Minnesota is home to more than 12,000 Cambodian Americans, 13,000 Lao Americans, and 33,000 Vietnamese Americans, and together we comprise nearly 17% of the state's Asian Pacific population. After the withdrawal of the United States from the war in 1975 and the fall of our countries to communism, Cambodians, Lao, and Vietnamese were killed in the crossing of the Mekong River, the Killing Fields, or in the South China Sea. Those who made it to the United States arrived with just the clothes on their backs and memories of war-torn cities, villages, and lost family members. What makes this tragedy more acute is that the elders in our communities played a front-and-center role in the Vietnam War. Most of those elders have since passed away without the recognition that they deserve. It is with this context that we encourage our great state to finally do right by our Cambodian, Lao, and Vietnamese veterans and communities.

Over the past two decades, Presidents Obama, Trump, and Biden have encouraged Americans to learn about and honor the sacrifices of Vietnam veterans. In following this leadership, we encourage your support of **H.F. 1440** so that locally, Minnesotans have the chance to learn about the sacrifices of the Cambodian, Lao, and Vietnamese ancestry communities before there is no one left to tell those stories firsthand. What happened in Southeast Asia between 1960 and 1975 is far more nuanced than most Americans understand. It is in recognition of that complexity that we are asking you to uplift these largely unseen and often poorly understood communities without whom it is impossible to tell the full story of the Vietnam War.

For the last several years, we have been working with the Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans to inform our elected and appointed officials of what our communities need at this historical milestone. By and large, our purpose is this: to ensure that Minnesotans have a more complete understanding of the conflict in Southeast Asia that we more narrowly refer to as the Vietnam War.

History doesn't end when an individual's life ends. Nor does that individual's impact end with their passing. But when memory is not preserved in an official capacity, events and individuals disappear.

Our elders deserve better. Your support of **H.F. 1440** is a step forward—to right a wrong, to correct an injustice, and to help put our veterans and their communities in the common memory bank. This year, 2025, is the end of the timeframe established by Presidents Barack Obama, Donald Trump, and Joseph Biden to commemorate the Vietnam War and its legacy for all Americans. **House File 1440** encapsulates this request by former and current presidents of both parties to honor all who served.

We thank Chair Nash for championing our noble cause. We hereby submit this letter, signed by Cambodian, Lao, and Vietnamese leaders whose communities inspired **H.F. 1440**.

Sincerely,

Bana Soumetho, *Chair*, Southeast Asian Leaders USA

Kim Sin, *Founder*, Cambodian American Partnership

Tri Tang, *President*, Vietnamese Community of Minnesota

Hoc Nguyen, *President*, Vietnamese Veterans Association

Bounnom Keophothisane, Lao Veterans of American

Aloun Phoulavan, *Co-Chair*, Southeast Asian Diaspora Project

Niphone Phommaras, *Executive Director*, Lao Culture Dance Fashion Minnesota

Sunny Chanthanouvong, *Executive Director*, Lao Assistance Center of Minnesota