



February 6, 2025

Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 720, Jefferson City, MO 65102

RE: *Expectations of Our Leaders - We are Missourians and Americans*

Happy Lunar New Year, Governor Kehoe,

We, the Board of Directors for OCA Advocate St. Louis (OCA), would like to share some concerns with you regarding attempts at legislation, nationally and in our State, that negatively impact Missourians. We, OCA, are a 501(c)(3) national organization with 35 chapters and affiliates that works to advancing the sociopolitical and holistic well-being of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders (AANHPIs). Throughout our 52-year chapter history of advocating for AANHPI civil rights in Missouri, our communities have continually witnessed and experienced harmful rhetoric and legislations that we ask you to address as our Governor, of all Missourians.

Words Do Matter: How would you feel if your family was wrongly accused or harmed due to misunderstandings or misinformation? Language shapes perception, and mischaracterizations can lead to policies that harm rather than protect our communities. Improper use of language and the blurring of terminology has caused a great degree of fear and misunderstandings in our State right now, resulting in division and distraction from solving the real problems that Missourians are facing.

In 2024, the Missouri House of Representatives hosted a special interim committee session on “illegal immigrant crimes.” OCA St. Louis believes it is appropriate to understand Missouri Crime statistics, in general, and to identify and address the root cause of **all** crimes. This effort should be a complete and transparent process that does not solely target immigrants, who many Missouri state officials have generalized as the only people who are illegally in our country and the major source of crimes. This is simply not an accurate reflection of the state data. Some Requests:

- Present statistics of all crimes so that the people of Missouri can understand the root cause underlying why it seems as though a subset group of people may be more likely to cause crimes. Address those causes rather than stigmatizing a whole group of people.
- Commit to ensuring that discussions and language on foreign policy do not lead to racial scapegoating (and racial profiling) of Chinese Americans (as 1 example) and the broader AANHPI communities. Consider how the dangers of broad generalizations, such as narratives and concerns about the Chinese government (PRC), have blurred the distinction between China’s policies and individuals (Americans) of Chinese descent, often leading to misplaced suspicion and generalizations in the U.S. Can one really pick out a China spy out of all the Asians in Missouri? People can’t even differentiate amongst our diversity of Asians.

Contributions of Asian Americans: A 2024 report from Saint Louis University found that the annual economic output from AAPI-owned enterprises in the St. Louis Metro area was \$6.5 billion.¹ The 2022 Missouri Governor’s Proclamation recognized the vital role AANHPIs play in business,



medicine, government, and education. Despite contributing in these positive ways to the State, recognition of Asian Americans often peaks during AANHPI Heritage Month and fades thereafter.

We exist more than 1 month a year. Some Requests:

- Implement year-round initiatives to highlight economic, educational, and cultural contributions of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders.
- Recognize, listen to, and ask for feedback on policies from Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders year-round.

Sustainable, Fair Policies for Immigrants: Imagine your ancestors (who were immigrants) coming to the U.S. yet unable to achieve the American Dream because of exclusive, unfair policies – where would you be now? We are very concerned with the concept of the proposed bill offering bounties for reporting undocumented immigrants and the threatening of birthright citizenship (Executive Order – Protecting the Meaning and Value of American Citizenship). This adds to the harmful recent history of policies prohibiting anyone on the list deemed “dangerous” from owning state property and because China was on the list, revoking visas for valued Chinese students. **OCA St. Louis wants to ensure safety for all U.S. citizens – but there are more productive ways to do so than by targeting immigrants, who are not the major cause of crime in our country.** Some Requests:

- Focus on policies identifying people from all demographic and population groups who commit crimes, rather than assuming that immigrants are the major source of crime. Statistically this is wrong. Reject policies that may amplify stigmatization, fear, and division in our state and country.
- Work with the Trump Administration to protect the Fourteenth Amendment which guarantees birthright citizenship and equal protection to **all people** born in the U.S. Align your policies with the Constitution, which recognizes birthright citizenship regardless of the legal status of an individual’s parents. That is not something one can control.
- Create a long-term vision for Missouri where everyone thrives. Align state policies with protecting the safety of all communities and consider who is left out when drafting policies.

As you can see, AANHPIs have played an important role, past and present, in shaping the history of the U.S. and the State of Missouri, yet many people in our community are continually targeted due to inaccurate and wrongful accusations of illegal crime. **As of this writing, we have been informed of many in our area called out in public and wrongly accused of being “illegal.”** **Our community is in fear.** OCA St. Louis is making significant and positive contributions to ensuring our state is a place where citizens today - and future generations - can thrive and be successful. We welcome further discussion with you and your staff to ensure that we can reach this goal together.

Sincerely,

The Board of Directors for OCA Asian Pacific American Advocates St. Louis

Peter Tao, Board President