

MATTHEW LUM'S TESTIMONY FOR THE LA COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

INTRODUCTION

My name is Matthew Lum and I'm the Board Chair of the Thai Community Development Center (Thai CDC). Thai CDC is a member of the Asian Pacific Policy & Planning Council, which is a part of the People's Bloc. The Thai CDC's mission is to advance the social and economic well-being of low and moderate income Thais and other ethnic communities in the greater Los Angeles area through a broad and comprehensive community development strategy including human rights advocacy, affordable housing, access to healthcare, promotion of small businesses, neighborhood empowerment, and social enterprises.

DEFINING COMMUNITY AND THAI TOWN

The Thai Community Development Center is an Asian Pacific Islander non-profit dedicated to the East Hollywood community consisting of immigrant communities from Thailand, Armenia, and El Salvador. Our non-profit founded the commercial district known as Thai Town which starts at Hollywood Boulevard and Western Avenue to as far east as Vermont Avenue and south to Santa Monica Boulevard which is east of the US 101 freeway.

THAI IMMIGRATION HISTORY

There are an estimated 100,000 Thais in Southern California. Though Thais have been coming to the US since the 1950s, the latest immigration wave have started from the 1980's until present, is characterized by immigrants with lower educational attainment (only up to a third grade level of education) and an unskilled/semi skilled workforce whose lack of English language proficiency and undocumented status makes them vulnerable to the most severe and egregious forms of exploitation. It is this group that represents the target population of Thai CDC. Because Thais are economic immigrants and are not refugees like other Southeast Asians in the United States, they are not eligible for public benefits and therefore, tend to fall through the cracks, having no resources to turn to for help when in need.

- 33% of Thais earned less than \$15,000 in annual income. (The median income in LA county for a family of four is \$52,300.)
- 29% of the Thai labor force is unskilled workers, the highest percentage in an occupation category.
- 42% of Thais do not have a high school diploma (LA country average is 16%)

EAST HOLLYWOOD DEMOGRAPHIC

In regards to the East Hollywood residents, The East Hollywood community is a very diverse mix of Latin Americans, Armenians, Russians and Thais. According to the US Census 2000, 35% live below the poverty (state average – 14%), 16% are unemployed (HealthyCity.org; Bureau of Labor Statistics.), 13% receive public assistance (state average – 5%, national -3%)

CONCLUSION

I request that Thai Town be considered as an entire district and not be divided into separate districts because of the unique demographic of the area, the need for affordable housing, and access to jobs. Thank you so much for your time commissioners.