



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Asian American and Pacific Islanders Commission

Bhutanese Listening Session

Lowell, Massachusetts

February 24, 2024

Event Summary: Key Insights from the AAPI Commission's Bhutanese Community Listening Session. The Massachusetts AAPI Commission held a pivotal listening session for the Bhutanese community. This meaningful event was organized in partnership with the Massachusetts Baptist Multicultural Ministries (MBMM) and the ACE Center for New Americans, reflecting a collaborative effort to engage with and understand the unique challenges faced by the Bhutanese community in Massachusetts.

Key Insights and Challenges Identified

- Immigration Process: The journey toward residency and citizenship presents considerable difficulties, underscoring the need for a more navigable and supportive pathway.
- Cost of Living Concerns: Affordability and access to housing, alongside the need for programs and activities tailored for children, are significant issues impacting the community's well-being.
- Resource Accessibility: Challenges in healthcare access and the necessity for comprehensive language support services are critical areas requiring attention and improvement.

Policy and Legislative Reforms Proposed

- Facilitate an easier and more accessible path to residency and citizenship.
 - Extend the employment search period from 3 to 6 months for new residents.
 - Ensure eligibility for public assistance is not contingent on employment status.
 - Expand citizenship clinic programs specifically tailored for individuals with limited educational backgrounds.
- Implement cost of living support measures:
 - Increase the availability of accessible or affordable educational programs for children.
 - Enhance funding and outreach for housing assistance initiatives.
 - Promote healthcare education and awareness programs.
- Improve language access services:
 - Mandate the inclusion of specific dialects in translation programs rather than broad language categories.
 - Require official documents to be translated into Nepali, specific to the Bhutanese community dialect, catering to the community's needs.
- Improve mental healthcare access

- Develop policies to improve access to mental health resources by addressing barriers such as language, literacy, and cultural differences.
- Enact policies that promote trauma-informed care across all healthcare and social service agencies working with Bhutanese refugees
- Work with community organizations and leaders to de-stigmatize mental health care

Community Concerns Highlighted

- Immigration
 - Healthcare requirements are expensive and difficult to access when not local: financial barrier.
 - Educational differences: people who are educated do not struggle as much, but many people in the community do not have much education and are much more likely to struggle
 - Refugee Health Cards: children born in refugee camps are given health cards rather than birth certificates, which the US government does not accept as proof of familial connection
 - Overall frustration with the immigration system
- Cost of Living, Housing
 - Extracurriculars for children can be prohibitively expensive, and information on free or low-cost programs is not available easily.
 - Community members are not aware of free programs at the library
 - Desire to pass on culture: there is no money to create programs for teaching the written language and other forms of culture
 - Not aware of RAFT and other programs that assist with affording housing
 - People did not know about first-time homebuyer programs
 - Housing is costly and costs the majority of many people's paychecks
 - Some community members do not pursue higher education because they do not want to burden their family financially
 - Community members report that the cost of living is high while wages are low in their community
- Healthcare, Mental Health Care
 - Bhutanese refugees in the United States fled ethnic cleansing in Bhutan
 - [Bhutanese refugees resettled in the United States are dying by suicide at approximately twice the rate of the general U.S. population](#)
 - Community members report significant mental health challenges caused by the trauma they experienced, both in Bhutan and refugee camps in Nepal, but
 - "Health education, cultural differences, and literacy make it difficult to access programs and resources."
 - Need for health education: community members report that many people only access health resources once their problem worsens.
- Language Access
 - Parents need help understanding the education system and resources for their children.
 - Lack of formal education means that many community members just speak their native dialect, not read it, meaning that translated forms are still inaccessible.

- Translators sometimes do not speak the same dialect
- No translation in Nepali at DMV for driver's license

If you have questions about these notes from the AAPI Commission or want to work with us, please contact Shubhecchha Dhaurali, Program and Research Director, at shubhecchha.dhaurali@aapicommission.org.