



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts Asian American Commission

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Ekta Saksena*

Executive Director

Yasmin Padamsee Forbes

One Ashburton Place

12th Floor

Boston, MA 02108

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Meeting Minutes

April 21, 2021, 6:30 pm to 8:00 pm

Meeting will be held via teleconference in compliance with the Governor's Executive Order on the Open Meeting Law and COVID-19

Present Commissioners are marked with a *. Absent Commissioners are highlighted

Staff present: Yasmin, Sheila, Kamalani, Jay, Lily, Sarah

Members of the Public: Janey Bishoff Amy Rabinowitz, Antonia Xu Liu, Mahal Alvarez-Backus

Attachments:

- 3/17, 4/13 meeting minutes
- Executive and staff reports
- AWFH sponsorship form
- Lily Tang extension request
- State & non-profit budget

1. Call meeting to order

Sam calls the meeting to order at 6:34 pm. The meeting is recorded.

Sam cites the recent murder of four members of the Sikh community in Indianapolis and holds a moment of silence in honor of the lives lost and the collective grief that our community is experiencing.

Haniya expresses support and empathy for the cumulative trauma that the AAPI community is experiencing. Haniya acknowledges that the EC fell short in reaching out to all Commissioners to lend support during this challenging time. She expresses concern that this incident isn't being called a hate crime by mainstream media.

Meena thanks the EC for raising this issue. She speaks to the courage and resilience of the Sikh community and their long history in this country. She mentions that their identity is very visible, and they have been targeted by violent attacks in the past. Meena cites the Gurudwara temple in Westborough and suggests reaching out and visiting them when it is safe to do so.

Betty mentions that many Sikh individuals were mistaken for Muslims and targeted after 9/11. She mentions that Asian American leaders have not spoken up about this issue. She suggests reaching out to grassroots Southeast Asian organizations, for example, the World Hindu Council.

Pralhad agrees with Betty's suggestion to reach out to members of the Sikh community and work with them.



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Sam affirms the importance of connecting with the Sikh and Southeast Asian community and thanks the Commissioners for raising this important issue.

2. Introduce Executive Director Yasmin Padamsee Forbes

Yasmin acknowledges the recent difficult events affecting the AAPI community and the importance to advance the rights and interests of the immigrant and refugee community. Yasmin cites her extensive career of serving the Asian community, including experiences working in Papua New Guinea and Myanmar, as well as various social justice organizations. She expresses interest in advocating on behalf of the AAPI community and expresses enthusiasm for being selected for the role of AAC's new Executive Director. Sam expresses appreciation for Yasmin's leadership.

3. Meeting Minutes: 4/13 – VOTE

A Commissioner notes that the data disaggregation bill is divisive, and the AAC should not take a stance on legislation because it is a non-partisan body. Sam mentions that the AAC's bylaws state that the Commission can advise legislative and executive bodies on legislation.

Vira motions to approve the April 13th meeting minutes. Danielle seconds.
AYs: Danielle, Bora, Ekta, Haniya, Megha, Nate, Philjay, Vira, Sam
Abstention: Betty, Mary Chin, Pralhad, Meena, Mary Lee
Motion passes.

4. Executive & Staff Reports

Jay gives the Executive Committee report and notes that Yasmin will give these reports moving forward. Jay notes that we will be receiving the AAC's tax returns from our accountant shortly. Jay thanks Commissioners who have submitted their compliance records, and notes that Sam will be contacting Appointing Authorities about Commissioners who are not in compliance.

Jay reviews financial information, highlighting \$8K in donations over the past four weeks that the AAC received via the Donate button on the website and social media. Jay states that the EC approved \$500 for the COVID Vax Help and up to \$500 to former Executive Director Jenny Chiang to help onboard Yasmin and provide institutional knowledge. Jay highlights upcoming programming, particularly the Commonwealth Seminar session on Saturday. Jay notes that there will be several events for AAPI Heritage month, including a biracial identity panel.

Sam thanks Jay for her hard work and dedication as Interim Executive Director.

Betty asks when the \$8K in donations were received. Jay cites that they were received over the past four weeks. Betty asks if the AAC received other donations in the past via our Donate button/PayPal account. Jay states that she cannot comment on what occurred under the previous Executive Director, and notes that the AAC was listed among organizations to support in combating anti-Asian



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violence. Jay specifies that the AAC did not solicit donations directly. Sam cites that these donations can be attributed to the increased public attention towards anti-Asian violence and mentions that this is also due, in part, to the greater visibility of the AAC's work.

Vira thanks Jay for serving the organization as Interim Executive Director and helping the AAC weather the transition. Vira proposes ensuring that these donations are allocated to support the most pressing needs of the AAPI community.

Sheila thanks Commissioners Haniya, Meena, Ekta, and Vira for providing input on the AAPI holidays that the AAC highlighted on social media this month. She mentions ongoing efforts to increase awareness and access to COVID-19 vaccines and ongoing translational efforts in partnership with COVID Vax Help.

Meena commends Sheila for highlighting various AAPI celebrations, including New Year's Day events for many Asian communities.

Kamalani highlights the recent increase in outreach related to combating anti-Asian racism and violence. She mentions a virtual town hall that happened with Senator Adam Gomez and a recent rally in Springfield focused on condemning anti-Asian hate. She highlights ongoing programming efforts related to the AAC's Education Subcommittee and interest from the community to be more involved in these efforts. She is working to build a partnership with Springfield College.

Meena thanks Kamalani for her work supporting the AAC Education Subcommittee and adds that they are working to develop a plan that they'll present to the Commission, including the possibility of offering Upstander Trainings and anti-racism training in the K-12 space. She welcomes any Commissioners who are interested to join the Education Committee.

Lily highlights her work highlighting the legislative process and compiling information on how AAPI residents can get involved in the government process. Lily mentions that 35 people have registered for Saturday's Commonwealth Seminar workshop. She plans to work with Sheila to develop captioned clips of the workshop in various languages. She highlights that Asian Heritage Month is coming up, and states that she's working to shore up programming, including the biracial Asian American women panel.

Meena thanks Lily for her great work and asks for them to connect further about possible collaboration on educational activities.



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5. Funding requests – VOTE

Asian Women for Health Mental Health Forum - EC recommends \$1,500

- Vira expresses support for this funding recommendation. Vira cites the expertise and ongoing work of the organization.
- Nate mentions that the Asian Women Mental Health Forum has been around for over 12 years, and it provides a critical platform for survivors and individuals with mental health needs.
- Mary Lee asks how the EC arrived at a recommendation of \$1,500. Sam cites the increased mental health challenges of Asian American women, in light of the recent violence in Atlanta. Sam also cites the forthcoming work of the grants committee to distribute funds to community organizations and encourages Mary Lee to join that committee if she's interested.
- Meena affirms the importance of supporting the mental health needs of Asian women at this time. Meena mentions an upcoming visa event happening in partnership with the Indian Consulate and asks about the process of having the AAC contribute financially to support this event.
- Betty mentions two financial entities of the AAC: a state appropriation and a charitable trust fund called the Massachusetts Asian American Commission, which was the basis for opening a nonprofit account in 2010. Betty asks from which account this funding would come from and requests clarity on this matter.
- Megha states that the Grants Committee will soon be releasing an application to distribute funds to community organizations, per the budget line item pertaining to grants to community organizations.
- Danielle mentions that the AAC on occasion receives funding requests from various organizations. She states that the EC shares all funding requests over \$500 with the full public body, and there have been no such requests that haven't been disclosed to the full AAC.
- Vira states that there are multiple ways that the AAC receives grant requests, including getting unsolicited requests for funds to sponsor an event or purchase an ad in a program.

Megha motions to allocate \$1,500 from the state appropriation to support the Asian Women for Health Mental Health Forum.

Betty asks where this funding would come from. Megha proposes that it come from state appropriation. Mary Lee asks how much the organization requested. Sam states that they requested \$500 and the EC recommends allocating \$1,500 given the heightened need for mental health services for AAPI women.

Sam motions to extend the meeting to 8:30 pm. Megha seconds.

AYS: Bora, Nate, Betty, Vira, Mary Chin, Meena, Danielle, Pralhad, Ekta, Mary Lee, Megha, Philjay, Sam

Motion passes.



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6. Public Input

Sam tables the current discussion to allow Mahal Alvarez-Backus to offer public commentary. Mahal expresses concern that the AAC has not issued a public statement condemning the police. Mahal cites historical events of violence and institutional racism perpetrated against the AAPI community, the long legacy of AAPI strength and resilience, and many instances of solidarity between the AAPI and Black communities. Mahal states that police were not present during these moments of resistance and have worked closely with ICE to funnel South East Asian communities to deportation. She cites the high rates of police-perpetrated violence, in which multiple people have been killed by the police in the past year. She presents 4 requests to the AAC: 1) learn about the true history of policing and the police industrial complex, including reviewing her resources related to abolition, 2) interrogate internalized anti-Blackness, colonialism, and imperialism in yourself and within the broader AAPI community, 3) draft and release a statement affirming that the AAC does not stand with the police, 4) do not collaborate with the police, and instead work with transformative community-based organizations advancing non-law enforcement strategies.

Sam thanks Mahal for her comments and states that we will continue the dialogue around these important issues. Sam returns to the agenda item about funding requests.

Meena motions to adjust the allocation amount for Asian Women for Health Mental Health Forum to \$500. Betty seconds.

AYs: Mary Chin, Pralhad, Meena, Betty, Bora, Danielle, Ekta, Vira, Megha, Philjay, Mary Lee, Sam.
Motion passes.

Mary Lee asks whether we need to take a vote to approve an appropriation of up to \$500. Danielle states that the bylaws indicate that the EC is empowered to make appropriations of up to \$500. Sam affirms that the EC will take a vote to approve this expense at our next weekly EC meeting.

Extending Lily for 2 months - EC recommends \$2,040

Megha motions to amend the EC's proposal to extend Lily's internship this summer for 20 hours a week (compared to the original proposal of 15 hours of week) at an expense of \$2,715. Bora seconds.

Betty asks where the money would come from. Megha states from the nonprofit account. Betty clarifies that Article IV, line 11, of the nonprofit trust, says that funds should not be used to promote propaganda, influence legislation, or to distribute money related to political campaigns.



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Bora states that it doesn't violate the provision. Megha clarifies that Lily's fellowship with a legislative body is separate from her work for the AAC, and therefore it doesn't violate that provision.

AYS: Megha, Bora, Danielle, Ekta, Philjay, Vira, Sam

No: Betty

Abstain: Mary Chin

Motion passes.

Sam moves to approve the motion as amended.

AYS: Bora, Danielle, Megha, Ekta, Philjay, Vira, Sam

No: Betty

Abstain: Mary Chin

Motion passes.

Megha motions to approve a one-time \$2K stipend in addition to her salary for Jay Wong to compensate her for Interim Executive Director duties from Feb 22-March 31.

Mary Chin proposes that the Executive Director should have the authority to make salary decisions about the staff. Mary recommends that there be a standard process to consider salary decisions moving forward.

Vira asks for clarification about whether this one-month stipend is intended to account for the fact that the AAC took longer than expected to hire an Executive Director. Megha says yes.

Bora suggests conferring with the HR office about this. Yasmin states that she's checking in with Payroll tomorrow and will ask them.

Mary Chin drops off the meeting at 8:17 pm.

Betty agrees that there should be standard practice for determining salaries.

Danielle affirms the importance of compensating Jay for her work and specifies that the original three-month stipend was intended to run through February 22, 2021.

Megha motions for Jay Wong to be compensated with a one-time stipend of \$2K in recognition of her Interim Executive Director duties from Feb 23 to March 31, pending approval and guidance from the payroll office.

Vira seconds.

AYs: Danielle, Megha, Bora, Ekta, Philjay, Vira, Sam

Abstain: Betty

Motion passes.



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Bora recommends revisiting the FY21 budget to accommodate this allocation. Sam notes that the AAC will need to revisit the budget and cut non-personnel line items to accommodate this unexpected expense.

7. Update on Remaining FY21 Budget (Executive)

8. New Business

Megha reports that the Anti-Asian Racism Committee proposes working on the issue of ethnic studies legislation. Betty expresses interest in participating. Megha reports that there are multiple similar bills on the issue and suggests that the AAC focus on raising attention to the broader issue of ethnic studies -- and not one particular bill.

9. Next Commission Meeting: May 18, 2021

10. Other community updates & Meeting adjourned

Sam motions to adjourn the meeting. Danielle seconds.
AYS: Betty, Danielle, Vira, Ekta, Megha, Philjay, Sam
Motion passes.

Meeting is adjourned as of 8:31 pm.