

DHS's Commitment to and Engagement with the AAPI Community

Posted by Ivan Fong on May 17, 2011 at 10:17 AM EDT

In celebration of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month, I want to share with you some of the exciting work that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has been doing with the AAPI community.

My parents came to the United States as immigrants, and my grandparents who came to the United States did not speak English, so I know from personal experience how important it is for the government to support new immigrants and to help with the integration process. DHS has a critical mission and has worked to make assisting the underserved AAPI populations in the United States a part of that mission.

Highlighting this commitment, Secretary Napolitano appointed me to serve as the DHS representative to the Federal Interagency Working Group for the White House Initiative on Asian American and Pacific Islanders, an initiative established by President Obama in October 2009. I am honored to serve in this capacity, and when the President visited the Interagency Working Group in March 2011, he challenged us to continue to move forward to implement the plans each agency (including DHS) has developed to advance the goals of the Initiative. As part of our plan, the DHS Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL) has strengthened policy planning and engagement efforts with the AAPI communities. For example, CRCL has launched new Community Engagement Roundtables in cities with significant AAPI populations, such as Seattle, Atlanta, Los Angeles, Houston, and the Greater Washington, D.C., area. CRCL is also leading efforts to improve access to DHS information and programs for limited English proficient (LEP) individuals by developing a Department-wide LEP Plan. We are also working with the Federal Emergency Management Agency to conduct focus groups with AAPI LEP communities to better understand and to help implement best practices in disaster preparedness, recovery, and response.

In addition, through U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and its Office of Citizenship, DHS continues to be a critical partner in promoting the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and providing integration tools and educational resources for immigrants, organizations, and other stakeholders that support immigrant AAPI communities. This support includes funding through the Citizenship and Integration Grant Program to community-based organizations for citizenship education and naturalization preparation services. Recently, USCIS Director Alejandro Mayorkas met with the Asian Pacific American Legal Center and other leaders of the AAPI immigration stakeholder community in Los Angeles to discuss issues such as language barriers and the provision of naturalization assistance by those who are unauthorized to practice immigration law.

These are just a few examples that highlight DHS's strong commitment to working collaboratively with the AAPI communities. As we observe AAPI Heritage Month, I'm proud to

say that I work for an agency that recognizes the needs of our diverse AAPI communities and strives to strengthen the fabric of our great nation.

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