

STATEMENT OF

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HEARING ON: POLICE AND ICE COLLABORATION

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Deportation has caused the widespread separation of Southeast Asian American families and cross-generational trauma for Southeast Asian American communities in Philadelphia and across the country. Since 1998, well over 13,000 Cambodian, Laotian, and Vietnamese Americans have received final deportation orders, including many legal permanent residents. In most of these cases, the individuals who were deported came to the U.S. as infants and toddlers, fleeing the conflicts in Southeast Asia as refugees with their families. Deportation in these and other immigrant communities soared after 1996, when Congress passed the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA) and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA). The laws created mandatory and automatic deportation consequences for a wide and poorly defined range of criminal convictions and sentences, and eliminated the ability of immigration judges to weigh the complex facts of each case. The laws were also made to be retroactive, meaning that noncitizens could be deported for certain crimes even if they were committed before the passage of the law. In every case, individuals serve their sentences through the criminal justice system, and many are in the process of turning their lives around when they are put into deportation proceedings.

Southeast Asians in the U.S. are deported on the basis of a criminal charge at three to four times the rate of other ethnic groups. Criminal deportation today in Southeast Asian American communities is an echo of past trauma and struggle. Southeast Asian communities came to the U.S. as refugees fleeing the U.S. war in Vietnam, its secret bombings of Laos and Cambodia, and the genocide that followed. Since 1975, an estimated 1.2 million refugees were resettled from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, the largest wave of refugees in U.S. history. Southeast Asian refugees arrived in the U.S. suffering from high rates of trauma and PTSD. A 2005 study of Cambodians in Long Beach, California, found that 62% of adults exhibited signs of PTSD and 51% suffered from major depression. Mental health issues were rarely diagnosed and even more rarely treated, and they impaired parents' ability to care for their children.

Many Southeast Asian youth, especially in the 1980s, had little support in schools or access to culturally or linguistically appropriate services, and many experienced racism and bullying. As a result of these challenges, some also turned to local gangs as their only source of communal support and resources. Today, high school completion rates for Cambodian, Hmong, Lao, and Vietnamese youth remain far below average. Youth who do not graduate from high school are much more likely to end up in prison, forming a school-to-prison pipeline for many youth of color. But the stakes are even higher for Southeast Asian youth without citizenship status, who go from prison to

immigration detention before being deported.

Current immigration laws do not serve the interests of developing long-term social and human capital within our communities. We need to invest in strong public education and public health programs that support immigration families and provide opportunities for all young people to realize their potential. We need to invest in re-entry and rehabilitation programs for people who have already paid their debt to society and are already rebuilding their lives. We need policies that make our communities stronger, not policies that create trauma and destabilization by deporting people who are fathers, mothers, business owners, employees, and friends. The proposed laws to reject detainer requests by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in Philadelphia jails will interrupt one piece of this deportation pipeline. We support the policy, and urge the City Council to protect *all* immigrants from ICE holds.