

Kansas Legislature
House Federal and State Affairs Committee
Testimony in Support of HB 2113
By Sarah Myose
February 17, 2022

Thank you Honorable Members of the Federal and State Affairs Committee,

My name is Sarah Myose and I live in Wichita. I have lived in Wichita all of my life and currently work at URGE: Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity as their Kansas State Organizer. In the past year, I have served as the Cultural Chair for the National Association of Asian American Professionals in Wichita and created a campaign to increase civic engagement among Asian Americans in Wichita called BE SEEN. Today, I firmly ask you to vote in support of HB 2113 to establish the advisory commission on Asian-American Pacific Islander affairs.

The Asian American population in Wichita and Kansas has grown significantly in the past 20 years. We are projected to be one of the top growing minority groups along with the Hispanic and Latino population. In Wichita alone, we are ranked as the 22nd city with the highest percentage of Asian population¹ in the United States. The Asian American population has unique needs that other minority groups do not. Asia itself encompasses 48 different countries and more than 2,300 languages. Add Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders to the group and you add 15 additional countries and 750 more languages. In Kansas, Vietnamese is the second most popular language spoken at home, followed by other Asian languages including Chinese, Arabic, Korean, Telugu, Tagalog, and Hindi. Many Asian Americans are first-generation immigrants and do not speak English as their first language.

I've noticed the unique diversity and experiences that encompass this larger identity of being "Asian" and "Asian American". Since the 1980s, many Vietnamese, Laotians, and Cambodians immigrated to Kansas to work in meat-packing plants in Garden City and Dodge City and airplane factories in Wichita in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. Asian Americans in Kansas are hard workers who are often marginalized from the political process because of language barriers, citizenship status, lack of education, and community access. This does not mean, however, that the Asian American population is apathetic or disengaged. This is where I believe the advisory commission on Asian-American Pacific Islander affairs can come in.

It's been more than 20 years since the establishment of a commission based on cultural and race/ethnicity needs. The Kansas African American Affairs Commission was created during the 1997 legislative session and the Kansas Hispanic and Latino American Affairs Commission was created in 1974 (formerly known as KACMAA). Despite Asian Americans making up 5% of the general population in Kansas, we are yet to be represented statewide.

In Wichita, I've seen the impact that increased resources can have on the Asian American population. I ran a campaign to increase civic engagement among Asian Americans in Wichita and saw an immense need for translated resources, culturally-relevant educational materials, community resources, business resources, and advocacy.

Because of this, I believe it is time for us to establish the AAPI advisory commission.

I ask you all to support HB 2113.

¹ <https://statisticalatlas.com/place/Kansas/Wichita/Race-and-Ethnicity>

Thank you for your time and efforts.

Sincerely,

Sarah Myose

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