



# Iowa Commission of Asian & Pacific Islander Affairs

Position Paper, March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2017

*HSB93/SSB1163: Act Relating to the Conduct and Administration of Elections*

The Iowa Commission of Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs is concerned about the impact of Division II of House Study Bill 93/Senate Study Bill 1163 (HSB93 & SSB1163) on Iowans, particularly those who are new citizens in our country or who are new to voting.

It is the goal of this Commission to build capacity for people to become agents of change in their communities. Achieving this goal requires the Commission to focus on helping Iowans understand and exercise their right to influence government. Voting is one of those fundamental rights.

Division II of this bill will require registered voters in Iowa to show one of six approved forms of identification prior to being given a ballot. We are concerned that this requirement will result in fewer qualified voters to participate in open and free elections.

- Forty-eight percent (48%) of Asian American and Pacific Islander Iowans (AAPI) have limited English proficiency and 15.2% of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in Iowa live below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL).<sup>1</sup> The combined effect of limited English proficiency, poverty and increased voter requirements called for in the current provisions of Division II in HSB 93 and SSB1193 may serve to impede access to the voting booth for many AAPI Iowans.
- Many naturalized citizens (who are former refugees and immigrants) from the Asian American and Pacific Islander communities do not have the government issued photo identification required in HSB93 and SSB1163 as it is currently written.
  - Refugees and immigrants often do not actively seek a government issued ID beyond those required for their employment. Because they frequently work long and/or irregular hours in jobs with minimal or no paid leave, rely on public transportation, and are often living in poverty, this population must prioritize their resources to those needs that allow them to function in day-to-day life.

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**The Iowa Commission of Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs is a governor appointed Commission comprised of public members who:**

Study opportunities and changing needs of Asians and Pacific Islander Iowans;

Serve as a liaison between the Department and the public;

Recommend legislative and executive action to the General Assembly and Governor; and

Establish advisory committees, work groups of other coalitions to achieve goals.

## 2017 Commission Members

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- Many Asian American and Pacific Islander Iowans are also first time voters. Voter education about voting requirements is most important for those who are not familiar with the process and our state's requirements. This bill does not provide for adequate education and outreach to new Iowans or new voters to inform them about election laws, requirements and responsibilities.

While the Commission does not support increasing requirements for voter identification in Iowa, we offer the following recommendations for improvement to this bill:

1. Fund and establish a robust voter education program in Iowa that incorporates feedback from the Commissions of the Department of Human Rights with a specific focus on educating new citizens and new voters. This education program should include basic introduction to the election and voting process as well as outreach and education regarding specific requirements.
2. Enhance the list of eligible voter identification options to include additional forms of identification that new citizens would already possess.

<sup>1</sup>U.S. Census Bureau 2009-2013; 5-Year American Community Survey