



The Legal Connection

Linking You to the Local Asian Pacific American Community

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Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center

Sept. 2002

A Message from the Executive Director

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Dear Friends:

Four years ago, a group of committed law students and attorneys came together with a vision of creating equal access to justice for Asian Pacific Americans living in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. While aware that the number of Asian Pacific Americans residing in the area was skyrocketing, the group also knew that basic legal services and the legal system were not accessible to our communities because of language and cultural barriers. They took action.

On a shoestring budget, they created a legal referral hotline by setting up two telephones in a tiny office at the Georgetown University Law Center. Each year since this modest beginning, the APALRC has taken significant steps towards realizing its original vision. Today, we are a vibrant and growing organization, with new office space, 4 full-time staff, 16 trained legal interpreters, and over 40 volunteer law students. In the past year alone, we have helped over 250 clients access critical legal resources, services and the legal system in such areas as immigration, domestic violence and employment discrimination.

Both our growth and success are deeply rooted in our belief in effective collaborations and partnerships. We take great pride in the partnerships that we have established with the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium, the D.C. Employment Justice Center, Catholic Charities Immigration Legal Services, Tahirih

Justice Center, Legal Services of Northern Virginia, Potomac Legal Aid Society, and the Legal Aid Bureau of Maryland. Together, we have worked to build a network of linguistically and culturally accessible legal services for Asian Pacific American residents and workers in D.C., Maryland and Northern Virginia.

As an organization, we are also committed to preserving and cultivating the spirit and enthusiasm that led to the original founding of the APALRC. In addition to providing law students with an opportunity to work directly with clients, we are committed to ensuring their continued representation on the Board of Directors. By providing students with opportunities to develop both their legal and leadership skills in a community context, we hope to do our part to encourage, inspire and prepare a group of law students into service as community lawyers and future leaders of community non-profit organizations.

On behalf of the board, staff and volunteers of the APALRC, we hope to share with you through this first edition of the *Legal Connection* the details of the work we are engaged in, and to which we have dedicated so much of ourselves. And through your continued support, we look forward to providing you with many more editions of the *Legal Connection* in years to come.

Best Wishes,

APALRC Testifies at D.C. City Council Hearings on Language Access

D.C. City Council hears first-hand accounts of communication gaps between Asian Pacific Americans (APAs) and the District's agencies.

By George Qi, Summer Intern 2002

This summer, the APALRC, together with other local Asian Pacific American (APA) organizations, testified before the D.C. City Council to advocate for the expansion of current D.C. law regarding the obligations of government agencies to provide language access to Asian Americans who are limited-English proficient.

D.C. City Council Member Jim Graham held the hearings to hear community concerns about the effect of D.C.'s 25-year old "Spanish language law" which requires D.C. government agencies to provide some forms of language access to Spanish speakers. At a hearing on June 17, 2002, the APALRC organized two panels of APA leaders who testified that APA residents in the District are not able to access government benefits entitled to them due to the lack of bilingual staff, interpretation services and translated materials on the part of government agencies.

The first panel consisted of representatives from Asian American LEAD, Chinatown Service Center and Boat People S.O.S., who provided real-life examples of individuals who have been detrimentally impacted as a result of the government's failure to provide language access to basic benefits. In turn, these groups have had to serve as interpreters between patients and doctors, and parents and teachers. APALRC worked closely with the organizations to research, prepare and draft their testimonies.

Some examples of the impact that the lack of language access is having on the APA community in D.C. include the following:

- Over 300 Vietnamese students, two-thirds of whom have limited to no English proficiency, attend D.C. public schools. Yet, only one school has hired any bilingual Vietnamese-speaking teachers at all (*Asian American LEAD*).
- A 35-year old Chinese immigrant with cancer often faces the District's healthcare system with only the Chinatown Service Center's (CSC) phone number

in hand. Without a bilingual individual at his side, the cancer victim must use CSC's staff to interpret conversations between himself and his doctors.

- Since September 11th, Vietnamese Americans who had been laid off had trouble obtaining unemployment compensation benefits from the Department of Employment Services in D.C. One individual did not receive his benefits for three months due to the inadequate language assistance provided by one of the District's one-stop centers (*Boat People S.O.S.*).



Deepa Iyer, APALRC Legal Director, testifies at the D.C. Council Hearing

The APALRC's Legal Director, Deepa Iyer, also testified at the hearing. Ms. Iyer spoke about the importance of expanding current D.C. law in light of federal obligations under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act which prohibits discrimination based on national origin. Ms. Iyer noted that the District's agencies should, at minimum, translate vital documents into Chinese, Vietnamese and Korean; hire bilingual staff where an agency has considerable public contact; and identify appropriate interpreter services with community input.

The hearing served as a symbolic moment for the D.C. APA community to raise concerns with respect to language access. The APA organizations plan to continue their efforts in advocating for an expansion of the current law to require government agencies to provide services in Asian languages as well.

The APALRC's work on language access issues continued in July when Ms. Iyer testified again before the D.C. City Council, this time to address the Metropolitan Police Department's (MPD) efforts in conducting outreach to the APA community in D.C. At the hearing, the APALRC advocated for the hiring of more Asian American officers (currently there are only 41 officers of APA descent out of 3800 police officers); the provision of public safety materials in Asian languages; and the importance of fighting bias crimes. For copies of written testimony, please contact Deepa Iyer at deepa.iyer@apalrc.org. ☺

Multilingual Hotline Makes Its Impact

By George Wu, Program Assistant

The legal referral hotline that was started and staffed by law students in 1998 remains one of the APALRC's main projects today. Through the generous support of the Open Society Institute and a partnership with the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium (NAPALC), the APALRC has been working to build the hotline project into a national model that can be replicated in other communities across the country. At the end of this year, the APALRC and NAPALC will be releasing a handbook for use by other community groups who are interested in starting a similar program in their cities.



APALRC Summer Interns conducting client intakes on the referral hotline

The APALRC hotline serves as the entry point for many Asian Pacific Americans into the legal services system, which has historically remained out of reach for the vast majority of Asian Pacific Americans because of language and cultural barriers. By calling the hotline number, mono-lingual clients are able to discuss their legal problems and issues in their native language with a law student volunteer. The law student volunteer conducts a thorough intake, and identifies an appropriate legal referral for the client. Through its legal interpreter project (see page 4), the APALRC is able to provide the client with ongoing language support once a referral is made.

Through the building of strategic partnerships with key legal service organizations throughout the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, the APALRC has created a network and a process by which clients can be quickly referred from the hotline to an appropriate legal organization for either brief advice or extended

legal representation. For example, the APALRC will be working over the next two years in partnership with Legal Services of Northern Virginia and Potomac Legal Aid Society in Falls Church, Virginia to develop a technologically based shared intake system between the three organizations, which will vastly increase APALRC's ability to refer cases to both these agencies in a timely fashion. The APALRC is exploring a similar model with the Legal Aid Bureau of Maryland to assist Asian Pacific American senior citizens better access the Bureau's services.

Bilingual law student volunteers continue to staff the hotline today. During the 2001-2002 school year, 42 law students speaking up to 10 different Asian languages volunteered their time and energy. This past summer, four full-time legal interns and one part-time legal intern assisted clients on the hotline. Between June 2001 and August 2002, law student volunteers have helped over 250 clients access critical legal services, information and resources on issues involving immigration, domestic violence, family law, and employment discrimination.

If you are interested in volunteering to serve on APALRC's hotline, please contact your law school liaison:

American University Washington College of Law

Joon Beom Chu, jabes74@hanmail.net

Georgetown University Law Center

Jessica Yeh, jjy2@law.georgetown.edu

George Washington University Law School

Miranda Tsai, mtsai@law.gwu.edu

If you are from an area law school which does not have a designated liaison, please contact Shaeli Agarwala at shaeli@apalrc.org. ☺

Legal Interpreter Project Launched

By George Wu , Program Assistant

The APALRC launched the Legal Interpreter Project (LIP) last fall as a companion project to the legal referral hotline. LIP’s goal is to ensure that once clients are referred from the APALRC hotline to a partner organization, language and culture do not continue to present barriers to services. Clients who complete their intake on the hotline are then matched with a trained interpreter who accompanies them to their appointment with the legal services attorney. In addition to interpreting between attorney and client, APALRC interpreters have also assisted in translating written legal documents, and interpreting at community workshops and at court hearings.

Since October of last year, the APALRC has held two interpreter trainings. Both trainings were hosted by Akin, Gump, Stauss, Hauer & Feld, L.L.P., and

were led by Angie Carrera, Coordinator of the Volunteer Interpreter Program of the Fairfax County Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court. In addition, attorneys from APALRC’s partner organizations led participants through various aspects of employment, family and immigration law. Currently, the APALRC has a pool of 16 active interpreters representing 10 languages, including Bengali, Cantonese, Cham, Hindi, Korean, Japanese, Mandarin, Punjabi, Urdu, and Vietnamese.

The third LIP training is scheduled for October, 2002. If you or someone you know is interested in applying to become an interpreter, please contact George Wu at 202-367-0793 or e-mail george.wu@apalrc.org.

How Well Do You Know the APA Community in the D.C. Metro Area?

1. Which county in Virginia experienced a 200% growth in the Bangladeshi community between 1990 and 2000?
2. What are the top three Asian ethnic groups in the District of Columbia?
3. Which county in Maryland has the largest number of Asian Americans?

Answers:

1. Fairfax County.
2. Chinese; Indian; Filipino.
3. Montgomery County (between 98,651 and 107,785 individuals).

Source: Facts derived from analysis by the Asian American Federation Census Information Center (Federation CIC) of Census 2000 data.

D.C.'s first APA Legal Clinic Held in June!

By Grace Nam, Summer Intern 2002

On June 18th, the APALRC held the first community walk-in legal clinic for the D.C.'s APA community at the Martin Luther King, Jr. library, a few blocks from Chinatown. The purpose of the clinic was to bring the APALRC's hotline functions and legal partners into the community to make our collective resources more visible and accessible. The event provided a unique opportunity for clients to receive brief legal advice from experienced legal services attorneys. Family law, immigration, public benefits, landlord/tenant, and employment law were chosen as the legal issues to be covered at the clinic.

The APALRC recruited and trained eighteen bilingual volunteers to conduct client intake. Of the eighteen volunteers who participated, there were six attorneys, four community interpreters, and eight law students. They spoke nine different Asian languages, including Cantonese, Gujarati, Hindi, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Punjabi, Urdu, and Vietnamese.

In addition, ten attorneys from five legal service organizations assisted in providing legal advice. The participating legal groups included Catholic Charities Immigration Legal Services, Catholic Charities Archdiocesan Legal Network, Bread for the City, the DC Legal Aid Society and the DC Employment Justice Center. Jane Ho, a private attorney, also participated.

During a two-hour period, twenty-eight clients received legal assistance at the clinic. The APALRC plans to conduct similar clinics in Northern Virginia and Maryland in the coming year. If you are interested in volunteering, please email us at hotmail@apalrc.org.



Bilingual volunteers conducting client intakes at the walk-in clinic

APALRC Thanks Our Outstanding Volunteers!

During the 2001-2002 school year, 42 law students volunteered their time and energy to the Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center's Legal Referral Hotline. With their language and analytical skills, not to mention their limitless enthusiasm, our volunteers assisted over 140 clients during the school year. Below are profiles of two volunteers who exemplify the commitment of those who keep the hotline running and open every year.

Jessica Yeh

Jessica has worked on the hotline since her first year of law school. Jessica starts her final year of law school as the Georgetown Student Liaison this fall and is a student member of the APALRC Board of Directors. Jessica's responsibilities include coordinating the recruitment and training of her fellow Georgetown law students, and helping to shape the future of the organization through fundraising and program development.



*Jessica Yeh
Georgetown University; 3L (2002-2003)*

"I hope to convince more Georgetown students that the APALRC is probably the most fun, friendly, and accommodating place one can volunteer at."

Young Ha Cho

Young began volunteering with the APALRC during the second semester of her first year of law school at George Washington University. Her willingness to go the extra mile was evident her first day on the job when she conducted an intake with a client for over an hour and stayed late to complete the case file. Even with a hectic school schedule, Young constantly took on assignments that required her to take work home.



*Young Ha Cho
George Washington Univ., 2L (2002-2003)*

"I think it is fortunate that the APALRC exists and is operating well in the DC metropolitan area."

APALRC Staff and Summer Interns



(l to r): Pauline Poh, George Wu, Jayne Park, Deepa Iyer

Jayne Park, Executive Director

Jayne began as APALRC’s first Executive Director in January, 2001, and since then has led the organization’s fundraising and program development efforts. Prior to joining the APALRC, Jayne was Senior Staff Attorney at the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium, where she led the Consortium’s national policy efforts on immigration, immigrant rights, and welfare reform. Jayne is a graduate of Brown University, and Boston College Law School.

Deepa Iyer, Legal Director

Deepa joined the APALRC as Legal Director in June of 2002. Deepa supervises the APALRC’s hotline and referral process and handles several policy issues relevant to the APA community in the DC area. Deepa was formerly with the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice and the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium. In 2002,

Deepa received the Asian Pacific American Bar Association’s AEF Community Service Award and the Sikh Coalition’s Leadership Award for her work on post-9.11 discrimination matters.

George Wu, Program Assistant

George joined the APALRC as a full-time Program Assistant in July 2001. Originally from California, George graduated from Johns Hopkins University with a major in English and a minor in Comparative American Studies. George’s responsibilities include overseeing and coordinating the Legal Interpreter Project (LIP). George is also heavily involved in the day-to-day operations of the Legal Referral Hotline and the office in general. George’s future plans include attending law school.

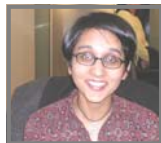
Pauline Poh, Development Assistant

In May 2002, Pauline joined the APALRC as a full-time Development Assistant. Pauline oversees the production of the *Legal Connection* and is in the process of reconstructing the organization web site. She also helps monitor organization finances and provides assistance in proposal writing and other matters related to fund development and public relations. Pauline attended the College of Business & Economics at West Virginia University and the Graduate School of Public & International Affairs at University of Pittsburgh.



Shaeli Agarwala

Shaeli is a 3L at George Washington University Law School and the APALRC’s Hotline Manager. As a 2L, shaeli served as the APALRC’s liaison for GW. During the summer, the APALRC was fortunate to have her oversee the hotline and mentor other interns. “I’m very excited and amazed at the growth the APALRC has undergone in the very short time that I have been involved.”



Benita Kim

Benita is a 2L at Georgetown Law Center. During the summer, Benita helped several Korean clients and worked on a street law project. Originally from New Jersey, Benita hopes to practice law in New York City after school. “I’ve had a great experience here and look forward to seeing the APALRC grow and continue its service.”



Grace Nam

Grace is a 2L at Cornell Law School. With her Korean language abilities, Grace helped over 30 individuals of Korean descent this summer. “I will miss the people and the work here so much.”



Tram Nguyen

Tram is a 2L at Howard University School of Law. On top of all her APALRC duties, which included working on the APALRC’s Language Access Initiative, Tram found time to train to become a licensed real estate salesperson. “I had a great time here and I learned a lot.”



George Qi

George is a 2L at Boston University School of Law. George has a J.D. and an LLM from China and practiced there before coming to the United States to attend law school. George handled over 40 cases this summer and was able to speak to clients in both Mandarin and Cantonese. “I’m very happy to have had this opportunity to serve the APA community.”



With Gratitude

The APALRC would like to acknowledge the following 2001-2002 funders for their support of our mission:

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D.C. Department of Health

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Holland & Knight, LLP

Korean United Methodist Church of Greater Washington

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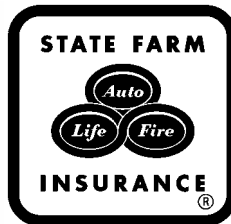
U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Special Counsel for Immigration-Related Unfair Employment Practices

United Methodist Church, General Commission on Religion & Race

Wiley, Rein & Fielding, LLP

We would also like to recognize the support of our individual donors, the South Asian Bar Association (SABA), the George Washington University Law School, the Georgetown University Law Center, and the Washington College of Law at American University.

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