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API Legislative Caucus Praises Governor Newsom for Pardoning Kao Ta Saelee

SACRAMENTO, CA — The California Asian Pacific Islander (API) Legislative Caucus thanks Governor Gavin Newsom for pardoning Kao Ta Saelee, an Asian American who completed a 22 year prison term and fought wildfires only to be placed in US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) custody on his release date.

Kao Ta Saelee and his family are from Laos and are of Mien descent, which is an ethnic minority that assisted the United States during the Vietnam War. At the age of 2 years, Saelee and his family fled to a refugee camp in Thailand and eventually called California home. Like too many Southeast Asian refugee families, Saelee’s family struggled to make ends meet and found themselves in neighborhoods with high rates of violence, poverty, and incarceration. At age 18, Saelee participated in an armed robbery and was given a 25 year sentence. While incarcerated and during California’s record breaking fire seasons, Saelee worked as an incarcerated firefighter; a program that is granted to those on good behavior. Despite his good behavior and completion of his prison term, Saelee was taken to an ICE detention center in Louisiana where he faces deportation to Laos, a country he has only lived in as a toddler.

“Thank you Governor Newsom for pardoning Kao Ta Saelee and for recognizing the inhumanity of his deportation,” said **Senator Richard Pan (D-Sacramento), Chair of the API Legislative Caucus**. “Saelee grew up in America because his family fought for the United States and became refugees. This pardon recognizes that Saelee is an American who committed a crime and paid his debt to society. He and other Southeast Asian Americans who came to our country as refugees should not be further punished by being separated from their families and deported to a country where they no longer belong. Thank you, Governor Newsom, for seeing the API community as Californians and acting with justice.”

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The California Asian Pacific Islander Legislative Caucus represents and advocates for the interests of the diverse API communities throughout California. It seeks to increase Asian Pacific Islander participation and representation in all levels of government.

Website of the California API Legislative Caucus: <http://apicaucus.legislature.ca.gov>