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November 17, 2017

The Honorable Elaine C. Duke
Acting Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Acting Secretary Duke:

On behalf of the California Asian Pacific Islander (API) Legislative Caucus, I write to express our deep concern about reports of targeted detainment and potential deportation of over 200 Cambodian and Vietnamese Americans by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials. According to civil rights organizations and news reports, many of these individuals are from California and the sudden enforcement activities have caused community panic and trauma for families.

The California API Legislative Caucus represents and advocates for the interests of the diverse Asian American and Pacific Islander communities throughout California. California is home to the largest Asian American and Pacific Islander population in the nation, including the largest Cambodian and Vietnamese communities. Our state is strong because of their important contributions to our communities.

Many Southeast Asian Americans are survivors of the Vietnam War and the Khmer Rouge Genocide. They were part of the largest refugee resettlement in our country's history and were placed in poverty ridden neighborhoods with significant crime rates. These factors coupled with language barriers, war trauma and lack of adequate resources contributed to numerous challenges adjusting to their new home. Some of these refugees were infants and children when they arrived and made mistakes in their youth resulting in prison sentences for their transgressions. Upon release, most are productive members of society, support their U.S. citizen families and adhere to the conditions of their release, including checking in with ICE.

We are concerned by reports from family members that individuals are abruptly detained, sent to other states and that their whereabouts are unknown to families for days or even weeks. Additionally, we are alarmed by reports that Vietnamese Americans who arrived to the U.S. prior to 1995 have been detained for potential deportation. This would be a violation of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Vietnam which protected those individuals from deportation. Finally, we are troubled that these detentions and our communities may be caught

between diplomatic disputes because Cambodian officials have requested a meeting to discuss revising their MOU with the U.S.

The California API Legislative Caucus supports the requests made by Congressmembers Chu, Correa, Khanna, Lieu, Lofgren and Lowenthal in their November 9th letter to the Department of Homeland Security. We urge the immediate release of the detainees, an explanation of shift in procedure leading to their detention, data on the number of individuals detained and transparency with families and organizations supporting impacted individuals. Thank you for your consideration of these concerns and requests.

Sincerely,



ROB BONTA
Assemblymember, 18th District
Chair, California Asian Pacific Islander
Legislative Caucus



KANSEN CHU
Assemblymember, 25th AD



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