

**2003 DRAFTING REQUEST**

**Senate Resolution**

Received: 07/16/2003

Received By: **pdykman**

Wanted: **Soon**

Identical to LRB:

For: **Gary George (608) 266-2500**

By/Representing: **Aaron**

This file may be shown to any legislator: **NO**

Drafter: **pdykman**

May Contact:

Addl. Drafters:

Subject: **Memorials - miscellaneous**

Extra Copies:

Submit via email: **YES**

Requester's email: **Sen.George@legis.state.wi.us**

Carbon copy (CC:) to:

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**Pre Topic:**

No specific pre topic given

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**Topic:**

Recognize the existence of and right to preserve the Hmong culture

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**Instructions:**

See Attached

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**Drafting History:**

<u>Vers.</u>	<u>Drafted</u>	<u>Reviewed</u>	<u>Typed</u>	<u>Proofed</u>	<u>Submitted</u>	<u>Jacketed</u>	<u>Required</u>
/?							
/1	pdykman 07/16/2003	kgilfoy 07/31/2003	jfrantze 08/01/2003	_____	sbasford 08/01/2003		
/2	pdykman 08/18/2003	kgilfoy 08/18/2003	jfrantze 08/18/2003	_____	sbasford 08/18/2003	sbasford 08/25/2003	sbasford

Vers.    Drafted    Reviewed    Typed    Proofed    Submitted    Jacketed    Required

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08/25/2003

FE Sent For:

*None  
Needed*

<END>

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/?	pdykman	1-7/31 Hmg	7/8/1	Self 8/1			

FE Sent For:

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Please call me if

You have any  
questions

- Aaron

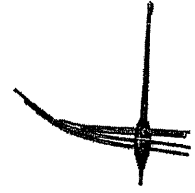
Office of Sen. George

266-2500



# SHEE YEE COMMUNITY OF MILWAUKEE, INC.

1717 W. Mitchell Street. Milwaukee, WI 53204  
(414) 383-3536



*Txujci Tuav Koom Txoos.*  
*"Tradition holds a community."*

## **HMONG CULTURAL PRESERVATION** State of Wisconsin

A proposal drafted by:

Lang Her, Executive Director, Shee Yee Community of Milwaukee, Inc., Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Vincent K. Her, PhD student, Co-coordinator, Hmong American Studies Initiative, Cultures and Communities Program, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Mary Louise Buley-Meissner, Associate Professor, Co-coordinator, Hmong American Studies Initiative, Cultures and Communities Program, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Submitted to the Office of Senator Gary George on May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2003.



## Purpose of This Proposal

We propose that the legislature of the State of Wisconsin officially acknowledge the importance and necessity of preserving Hmong culture. Two central principles underlie this proposal: 1) Hmong culture is integral to the identity of Hmong American citizens of Wisconsin and 2) it is an invaluable part of the multicultural diversity of the state. This legislation can enhance Wisconsin's political image and standing as a place that welcomes, tolerates and promotes diversity within its borders. Furthermore, it will reinforce the crucial role of culture as the foundational basis for the moral and social development of individuals and communities, including educational and economic aspirations to become contributing members of U.S. society. Official state recognition is essential for establishing the legitimacy and credibility of the culture and its traditional practices. Recognition and representation go hand in hand. Acknowledging the participation of Hmong Americans in the State's political process, the State legislature has the opportunity to show these new citizens that they "belong" here in Wisconsin. The act will sow pride and sense of belonging in the hearts of Hmong Americans.

## The Hmong in the United States

The Hmong are relatively new citizens of the United States. Most arrived as war refugee immigrants from Laos after the U. S. withdrew its troops from Southeast Asia in 1975. From the early 1960's until the end of the Vietnam War, thousands had fought as a clandestine Special Guerilla Unit for the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Despite the multitude of challenges they faced in the early stages of resettlement, the Hmong American community has been undergoing vibrant transformations during the past twenty-five years. The U. S. is not only a place of refuge, but a permanent home for the Hmong people and culture to flourish, as part of the forces that shape America's ever-growing cultural and social landscape. With a history of global diaspora, Hmong people also can be now be found in China, Southeast Asia (Myanmar, Vietnam, Thailand and Laos), Australia, France, Germany, Canada, and South America.

The influx of the Hmong has added to the richness of the world cultures represented in American society today. Indeed, this country is poised to become a center of Hmong diasporic culture, influencing and impacting changes elsewhere in the world. Hmong tapestry, or *paj ndau*, a creative art tradition of Hmong women, hang in the show cases of many modern museums, private residences and various social and educational institutions. The Hmong National New Year, held yearly in Fresno, California, and the July 4<sup>th</sup> Festival in the Twin Cities draw thousands of people from all over to these regions, boosting the local economy and businesses, including hotels, restaurants, service stations and so on. Likewise, the Summer Cultural Festival held in Green Bay, Wisconsin invites the general public to a cultural experience of food, entertainment, sporting events, open-air dining and other festivities. The Asian Moon Festival, held on the Summerfest grounds every June in Milwaukee, also provides a glimpse of Hmong contemporary culture and tradition. These occasions are for public enjoyment, but most significantly, provide opportunities for Hmong Americans to re-think, evaluate and redefine their culture, identity, ethnicity and place in urban America.

The experiences of Hmong Americans are gradually being introduced to academics and students on university and medical school campuses across the country. Books such as Anne Fadiman's *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and The Collision of Two Cultures* and recent documentaries such as *The Split Horn: Life of a Hmong Shaman in America* have sparked discussions on religious pluralism; the role of cultural practices in people's decision-making process; and the need for cross-cultural dialogue to increase knowledge, awareness, understanding and appreciation of diversity in belief systems. This is the kind of knowledge and

awareness which all Americans, including Hmong Americans, should aspire to achieve. However, much more needs to be done to make this possible.

### **The Importance of Culture and the Necessity of Its Preservation**

Culture can be defined as the “shared practices of a group, community or society, through which meaning is made out of the visual, aural and textual world of representations” (Sturken and Cartwright 2001: 3-4). Culture enables a people to know the past and learn from it, to build on the present and envision the future. A sense of identity emerges out of the interaction between the culture, the individual and the places that circumscribe his or her social world. The roots of ethnic identity are integral to an individual’s evolving growth. For example, evidence suggests that students, especially those beyond high school, who have strong cultural identities and values generally do better in school. They are more focused and poised to face and tackle the challenges that converge on them during their academic careers.

Furthermore, America is a melting pot of cultures, ideas and practices. As such, culture for each ethnic group has symbolic value; it concerns the politics of representation—of voice, presence and recognition. Hmong Americans would like to be recognized on both the regional and national scene. Legislation to promote cultural preservation is a necessary step toward this goal. It should include official acknowledgment of the strength and richness of Hmong culture ,which is embodied in and encompassed by the following:

1. Cultural traditions such as the New Year festivities and celebration; the wedding rites and mortuary rituals, with all of their accompanying proceedings, symbols and procedures; and oral traditions, legends and myths which make up the oral, creative and literary aspects of the culture
2. Religion and related belief systems, enabling people to cope with day-to-day struggles, shape an understanding of their world and live healthy lives. Also included here is the use of traditional healing methods, such as herbal curative and preventive measures to promote physical health.
3. Family as an institution that fosters the development of productive citizens through the teaching and transmission of knowledge about religious practices; social structure, which is built around an interlinking network of clan relations; and cultural values essential for maintaining a functional family, including respect for parents and the elderly.
4. Language (written and oral).

### **Cultural Preservation in the Community**

Cultural preservation is the mission of Shee Yee Community of Milwaukee, Inc., a non-profit organization which serves as a central cultural resource base, including the collection (using audio and visual recordings), documentation, preservation, exhibition and presentation of the culture to the general public. Shee Yee is prepared to adopt the procedures established in Malaro (1998), and Buck and Gilmore (1998) for the accessioning, management and care of cultural artifacts. Its staff is well-qualified to develop educational programs, such as exhibits, cultural performances and other events, by working collaboratively with various institutions. The aim is to promote community learning and crosscultural understanding. Shee Yee has been amassing artifacts, oral and printed materials for these purposes. In addition, it has the resources and support of many Hmong cultural experts. It is currently an active partner of the Hmong American Studies Initiative at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Together, these, along with other organizations in the Milwaukee area, work to advance understanding of Hmong American history, culture, and contemporary urban life. Such efforts are intended to enhance public awareness of Hmong Americans as fellow citizens, and contribute to the progress that Hmong Americans are making toward full equality in U.S. society. Therefore, Shee Yee is well-suited to serve as a centralized location for people to come to learn about Hmong culture, beliefs and practices.

## The Continuity of Hmong Culture

Hmong traditions date back many thousands of years, a dynamic force which holds people together and keeps their culture intact. These practices reinforce the ideas, meanings and experiences that shape individuals and their communities through their social interactions and interrelationships. Hence the present is possible only because the past has remained meaningful. For example, the Hmong celebrate the New Year around Thanksgiving, based on a Hmong lunar calendar. The New Year is a time for renewal, refocusing and reflection. It is the time when the altars are re-decorated and re-dedicated; the ancestors are remembered and invited to feast with the family; the children are washed; new wishes and hopes of wealth and prosperity are set in motion; the *neeb* powers or *qhua neeb* (spirits who assist the shamans in his quest) are relieved of their duties for a brief period (they are sent away to rest by the shaman); and boys and girls put on their best clothes to celebrate the coming of the new year and the passing of the old. Through these festivities, a person learns what it means to be a Hmong, and now, Hmong American.

Overall, Hmong Americans will continue to carry on many of their traditions, including funeral services for its deceased members, secondary rites for the souls of the deceased, as well as birth and healing ceremonies. These are important and fundamental aspects of personhood and ethnicity. Without these, the meanings of the self and community would be not only called into question, but seriously threatened.

## Support for Legislative Action

Hmong Americans across the State of Wisconsin are ready to support legislation which will officially acknowledge the necessity and value of cultural preservation. Shee Yee Community, Inc. will be glad to cooperate with State representatives in doing whatever is required to move this legislation forward.

## APPENDIX

### ABOUT SHEE YEE COMMUNITY OF MILWAUKEE

Founded in 1987, under the Internal Revenue Code of 501(c) 3, Shee Yee Community of Milwaukee, Inc., (SYC) was created to care for, unite, empower and integrate Hmong immigrants into mainstream society through its services, programs and projects. SYC has since been committed to assist Hmong people to become productive citizens in Wisconsin. Currently, there are an estimated 40,000-60,000 Hmong people living in Wisconsin.

### GOVERNING BODY

Composed entirely of volunteers, the governing body and staff members do not draw any compensation for the thousands of hours they devote to SYC each year. In addition, for more than 14 years, all the expenses have been paid with governing body and community-donated funds. Until now, SYC has not made any grant requests.

The 11 members of the SYC board consist of strong Hmong leaders with a sincere dedication to their community. Board members include successful business people, health care professionals and adults who have chosen to return to school to enhance their community outreach skills.

The SYC board welcomes participation on its board of any representative of the Forest County Potawatomi Community. A complete list with the names and addresses of the governing board is attached. (Please note: The entire Hmong population consists of 18 clans. Each of these clans has a surname. While individuals may be generationally separated, to Americans it looks as if they are all related. This is brought to your attention because so many of the names of board members appear similar.)

### SUMMARY

Culturally, the Hmong, like Native Americans, revere age. It is virtually unheard of for a Hmong family to place their elders in nursing home facilities. The families take care of their mothers and fathers, grandfathers and grandmothers, in their homes. However, many of these families lack not only the financial resources to care for their elderly, but the home-health education that is also required.

Language for the SYC target group has been a huge barrier to its stability. Since its inception, the SYC has provided translation and interpretation services. Luckily, many volunteers and governing board members have successfully grasped the American language and culture. They have provided invaluable assistance to help less fortunate community members navigate the social services maze.

Many elderly Hmong in Milwaukee suffer from physical as well as psychological problems. Many were once respected officials in Southeast Asia. However, the American language and cultural barriers have proved to be extremely difficult to overcome. Leaving positions of power, a culture they understood, friends, relatives and the material comforts their positions once afforded them, has been physically and psychologically painful. Depression and memory loss are common. Inactivity has led to physical atrophy.

The SYC programs currently in place are helping to mitigate these problems. However, there is much more that can be done if the resources and services can be expanded. And while older Hmong fight significant personal problems, they are also facing serious issues with their children.

As the younger Hmong population expands its socialization in school and in neighborhoods, many are being exposed to an unfortunate side of American life -- street gangs. Since many of the SYC youth sector of the target population are "rudderless" at home, they are finding solace and acceptance with crime in numbers. Asian street gangs are becoming a serious scourge on the south side of Milwaukee. Nearly 50% of the SYC target group families have children who are underachieving in school and vulnerable to gang participation. But the SYC believes with proper intervention, this tide of youth crime and violence can be turned.

### **SUCSESSES THUS FAR**

Even with a lack of a permanent location and limited funds, the SYC offers the following programs:

1. Translation and interpretation
2. Employment training and assistance
3. Consulting and counseling services
4. Youth and elder care

Each year the SYC, with no outside funding, has provided service to its population. And the services transcend all aspects of life, from burying the dead, to helping young newlyweds get a happy start in life. SYC has helped many:

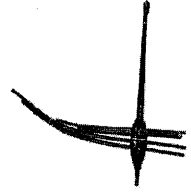
- More than 150 families have asked SYC for translation assistance each year.
- More than 100 families have asked SYC for crisis intervention each year.
- Each year SYC has conducted dozens of cultural and educational conferences to help families integrate into the greater Milwaukee area.
- Since 1990, SYC has assisted 100 families with funeral arrangements for their loved ones. This has included financial contributions, as well as alerting social services agencies for assistance and helping with special legal matters.
- In the past 10 years, through SYC interventions, training and counseling nearly 90% of the target group is employed, albeit in low paying jobs.
- Nearly 150 elderly Hmong have been helped by SYC each year. Currently 77 elderly are being closely monitored.
- The SYC has helped more than 500 couples plan their cultural wedding ceremonies and provided financial support for the celebrations from 1987 to the present.

## REFERENCES

1. Buck, Rebecca A., and Jean Allman Gilmore. (Eds.) 1998. *The New Museum Registration Methods*. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums.
2. Fadiman, Anne. 1997. *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.
3. Malaro, Marie C. 1998. *A Legal Primer on Managing Museum Collections*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.
4. Malpas. J. E. 1999. *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*. Cambridge (UK): Cambridge University Press.
5. Sturken, Marita, and Lisa Cartwright. 2001. *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press.
6. *The Split Horn: The Life of a Hmong Shaman in America*, videorecording produced by Taggart Siegel, Jim McSilver and Sarita Siegel. New York, NY: Filmmakers Library, Inc. 2001



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1717 W. Mitchell Street  
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(414) 383-3536



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"Tradition holds a community."

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Ju Lang Her

**BOARD MEMBERS**

- Saylee Vang, president
- Chuevang Xiong
- Sher Thao, Secretary
- Cheu K. Xiong
- Anna Townes
- Zang Yang
- Chong Neng Moua
- Zang Moua Xiong
- Chuevang Xiong
- Nao Pao Vang

**GROUP LEADERS**

- Soua Koua Xiong
- Chong Neng Moua
- Sa Xiong
- Kevin Her
- Pao Lee Vang
- Chue Vang Lor
- Wa Chong Vang
- Nha Long Her

**ADVISORS**

- Victor Xiong
- Kevin Her
- Will J. Xiong
- Donald Xiong
- Kenneth Her
- Lucien Nao P. Lee
- Xao Kee Xiong

May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2003

Wisconsin State Capital  
Office of Senator Gary R. George  
C/O Mr. Locha Thao  
Room 22 South  
P O Box 7882  
Madison, WI 53707-7882

Dear Mr. Thao:

On behalf of the Hmong people of Wisconsin, Shee Yee Community of Milwaukee, Inc., is in need of your help and support to ask Senator Gary R. George to sponsor a Hmong Cultural Preservation Bill. The Hmong people ask that the State of Wisconsin to [REDACTED] the [REDACTED] to preserve [REDACTED].

Enclosed please find a draft of the ideas and thoughts of the Hmong community. We ask that Senator Gary R. George sponsor it and put it into the correct format. If you need additional information, please let me know and I will provide it.

Sincerely yours,

Ju Lang Her, Executive Director



State of Wisconsin  
2003 - 2004 LEGISLATURE

LRB-2988/1

PJD: King

## 2003 SENATE RESOLUTION

1 **Relating to:** recognizing the existence of the Hmong culture and its value to all  
2 Wisconsinites and the right of the Hmong people to preserve their culture.

3 Whereas, Hmong culture is integral to the identity of Hmong American citizens  
4 of Wisconsin and is an invaluable part of the multicultural diversity of this state; and

5 Whereas, the influx of the Hmong has added richness to the "world cultures"  
6 represented in American society today; and

7 Whereas, Hmong traditions date back many thousands of years, a dynamic  
8 force that holds people together and keeps their culture intact. These practices  
9 reinforce the ideas, meanings, and experiences that shape individuals and their  
10 communities through their social interactions and interrelationships. Hence, the  
11 present is possible only because the past has remained meaningful; and

12 Whereas, overall, Hmong Americans will continue to carry on many of their  
13 traditions, for without them, the meanings of the self and community would not only  
14 be called into question, but seriously threatened; now, therefore, be it





2  
redraft  
PW

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