

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
OFFICE ON ASIAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER AFFAIRS**



Performance Oversight Hearing  
On  
The Mayor's Office on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs

Testimony of  
Ben de Guzman  
Director

Before  
The Committee on Human Services  
Council of the District of Columbia  
The Honorable Matthew Frumin, Chairperson

1350 Pennsylvania, Avenue NW  
Washington, D.C. 20004  
Date: February 13, 2025

Good afternoon, Chairman Frumin, members of the Committee on Human Services, and staff. My name is Ben de Guzman, and I am the Executive Director of the Mayor's Office on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs (MOAPIA). I am pleased to testify before you today to provide an overview of MOAPIA's performance for Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24) and Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25) to date.

The mission of MOAPIA is to improve the quality of life for Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) residents of the District of Columbia through advocacy and engagement. For over 30 years, we have played the two-fold role of 1) representing Mayor Muriel Bowser to the AAPI communities providing information about city government resources; and 2) advocating for the AAPI community in District government to ensure that all residents have equitable access to public agencies and their services, regardless of their race, ethnicity, national origin, or immigration status.

To accomplish our mission, MOAPIA provides three core services: the Office 1) assists all District AAPIs in accessing services from District agencies, and advocates for the issues affecting their quality of life, regardless of where in the AAPI community they come from; 2) assists District agencies with building their capacity to provide culturally and linguistically competent services to District AAPIs; and, 3) continues to provide the AAPI community with access to grant funding to support their unique needs, whether in the community or the District's business sector.

According to census statistics, the AAPI population grew to 37,974 residents, or about 5.4 percent<sup>1</sup> of the entire District population in 2019. This represents about a 60 percent increase from 2000. The Asian population is most concentrated in Wards 2 and 3, although it is increasing in other wards as well. Along with the population increase, the number of Asian-owned businesses is rapidly growing. For example, the 2012 Survey of Business Owners from the Census Bureau reports that there are a total of 3,974 Asian-owned businesses in the District producing \$2.1 billion in revenue.<sup>2</sup> This is a 15.4 percent increase in the number of businesses and a 16 percent increase in revenue, compared to 2007. The most recent census data also indicates that 2% of the District's population speaks Asian and Pacific Islander languages at home and 23 percent of the Asian American households in the District are limited English proficient. Nationally, it is recognized that AAPIs are the fastest growing racial and ethnic group in the country.<sup>3</sup>

For FY24, MOAPIA exceeded all our Key Performance Indicators (KPI), meeting all our goals regarding performance metrics. This level of performance has become our standard, that

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census, 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates

<sup>2</sup> 2012 Survey of Business Owners and Self-Employed Persons (SBO)

<sup>3</sup> Pew Research Center 2015



we have continued to meet year in and year out. Some of the highlights of our work in FY24 included: 1) our AAPI Community Grant Program reaching 5,669 clients through our 9 grantees; 2) our business outreach program visiting 312 AAPI owned small businesses in all 8 wards; 3) 100% of the technical assistance provided to district agencies being rated as Satisfactory of Above; and 4) providing translation/quality control for 178 documents across city government in three languages (Chinese, Vietnamese, and Korean).

MOAPIA's AAPI Community Grant Program has been a longtime resource for MOAPIA to advance its mission to improve the lives of AAPI residents and business owners in the District. MOAPIA is able to expand its reach into the community through these investments in trusted institutions. In FY24, MOAPIA awarded a total of \$271,796.24 in grants to ten community-based organizations that support AAPI communities. The cohort of nine grantees included long-standing partners of MOAPIA with decades of experience, as well as a new grantee that promotes AANHPI art and culture.

Outreach to AAPI owned businesses and residents has been part of MOAPIA's programming throughout its 37 year history. MOAPIA's staff meet with businesses that come to our offices in Judiciary Square for support, and also deploy on a regular basis to support business owners at their locations across all 8 wards. In FY24, in addition to the 312 visits to AAPI owned businesses, MOAPIA staff responded to 674 cases to provide assistance and support. MOAPIA outreach staff bring multilingual expertise to this work, providing support not only in English, but also in Chinese, Vietnamese, and Korean.

These three languages are covered by the provisions of Washington, DC's Language Access Act, and MOAPIA's work to ensure the District's compliance with this legislation requires a larger cadre of multilingual expertise than any other agency in the Mayor's Office of Community Affairs cluster. In addition to these languages, MOAPIA staff also speak Tagalog, Spanish, and Tok Pisin (language spoken in Papua New Guinea).

Working in conjunction with District agencies, MOAPIA staff translated 178 documents into Chinese, Vietnamese, and Korean. In accordance with the Language Access Act, MOAPIA reviews the work of more than 30 agencies to ensure compliance. Working across generations, MOAPIA also translated outreach materials for the annual Summer Youth Employment Program and encouraged DC AAPI Youth to apply to this longstanding program.

With longtime staff departing and new staff onboarding, MOAPIA's team experienced a number of transitions in FY24. New challenges presented themselves, and with much of the change that is happening taking place in locations such as Chinatown, MOAPIA is poised to take on these new challenges and play an active role in writing the newest chapter of Washington, DC's story.



Chinatown has become a central focus for much of MOAPIA's work in supporting the Mayor's initiatives to revitalize Downtown. If we think of the Chinatown Arch as a gateway that works in both directions, it is both a gateway from the Downtown to Chinatown and at the same time serves as a gateway for the Chinese American and AANHPI communities to the broader Downtown and the District as a whole.

The Mayor welcomed the Lunar New Year of the Dragon by participating in the annual Chinatown Lunar New Year Parade on February 11, 2024, as she has done every year of her Administration. The very next day, she returned to open the first ever Safe Commercial Corridor Hub in the neighborhood. This groundbreaking initiative has brought together staff from government agencies such as the Department of Behavioral Health, the Department of Human Services, and the Metropolitan Police Department to provide a more direct connection for residents and businesses to support, resources, and services. MOAPIA used its longtime connections in the community and its experience and expertise in local language and culture to play a leading role in anchoring the Hub more deeply in the neighborhood.

MOAPIA also leveraged these connections and experience to support the Mayor's Gallery Place/Chinatown Task Force. The Mayor convened this group of public servants, advocates, and stakeholders to put together recommendations to improve this historic district. MOAPIA helped connect the Task Force to legacy organizations, businesses, and resident serving organizations and provide linguistically competent education efforts in the community to make sure that the Task Force is best able to communicate with the community.

In the closing days of FY24, MOAPIA partnered with the Department of Small and Local Business Development (DSLBD) to kick off their Dine All Night program with an Asian Pop-Up Night Market. The Mayor joined MOAPIA and DSLBD for a press conference to announce the Night Market and Dine All Night. Downtown BID also supported the event, which brought thousands of attendees to sample wares and cuisine from 10 vendors. Participants were also able to enjoy cultural performances and an art installation. The Gallery Place/Chinatown Task Force solicited many recommendations calling for a Night Market, and MOAPIA is proud to have led the District's first project based on this feedback, which will lay a foundation for future similar activations.

The Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander Community has long been a key partner with MOAPIA in building community. Bringing together committed residents from across the District who representing a diverse array of interests and perspectives, the Commission has been a key resource for MOAPIA, including for providing insight into the needs of the AAPI community. The Commission's Pacific Islander Sub-Committee has been particularly active in ensuring this often overlooked constituency is able to engage with the Mayor's Office. In June of 2024, MOAPIA was able to secure a Mayoral Proclamation recognizing King Kamehameha Day, an important cultural observance for the Native Hawaiian community. MOAPIA Director Ben de



Guzman presented this Proclamation at the Lei Draping Ceremony at the Statue of King Kamehameha in the US Capitol Visitor's Center. Washington, DC is proud to be the only location outside the islands where this long beloved ceremony is held. For the past four years, MOAPIA and the Commission have also worked together to provide a Mayoral Proclamation recognizing Guam's Liberation Day, a key holiday for the island territory.

MOAPIA shared information about the historical events and activities it participated in during FY24 through its active social media platforms. Over the course of FY24, MOAPIA experienced growth across these platforms. Our social media platforms are a vital way we get the most current information about city government, emergency updates, and first responder information out to constituents, especially to those who do not speak English.

I am proud to work in partnership with Mayor Bowser and with your Committee in helping write this new chapter. Our team stands ready to work with you in service to all of our residents and business owners in pursuit of common goals. I submit this testimony to the City Council and am happy to answer any questions you may have.

