



January 28, 2025

Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson
State Capital Bldg, Rm 30
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Senator Gray-Jackson,

My name is Alma Manabat Parker and I am the Strengthening Cultural Unity Task Force Coordinator and Health Equity Director for the Ketchikan Wellness Coalition. In addition, I am the program director of "Magsayawan (Let's Dance) Ketchikan". I am writing to express my enthusiasm and strong support for Alaska Senate Bill 6, an act requiring education in the history and contributions of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

I am a Filipina who has called Ketchikan, Alaska home for 44 years. My family immigrated from the Philippines in 1974 through my father's enlistment into the US Coast Guard. We moved to Kodiak in 1977 and then to Ketchikan in 1980. Currently, Filipinos make up approximately 10% of the population in Ketchikan, the 2nd largest minority group following Alaska Natives. The 2020 census recorded that Asians are 6.7% of the state of Alaska's racial composition, of which 4.4% are Filipino. We have a prominent presence in Alaska and make valuable contributions to its growth and prosperity.

All of my elementary education has been in Alaska; I am a Ketchikan High School Class of 1991 Alumni, and I have little to no recollection of learning about historical contributions of Filipinos or other AAPIs within our state. My only connection to my culture was through local Filipino folk-dance classes held at the local Filipino Community Center. Since its closure in 2015, we are seeing a growing absence of Filipino cultural representation in Ketchikan and a fear of youth losing their cultural identity and heritage. To ensure we addressed this growing disparity, I pursued and received funding in November 2022 to revitalize Filipino folk dance and music through cultural enrichment classes through Magsayawan Ketchikan. The program continues to thrive and is gaining momentum, but this culturally centered programming only touches the surface of educating our youth on AAPI history in Alaska.

Through the Ketchikan Wellness Coalition's efforts in health equity and cultural enrichment projects, we are seeing a rebirth to reinvigorate Filipino culture and we are creating platforms to elevate our voices that impact Filipino health and overall wellness. As we see health outreach efforts expand and community member participation and attendance at Filipino cultural events grow every year, I can sense the desire of Filipinos wanting to be recognized and heard, especially amongst the youth. Senate Bill 6 will ensure Alaska's K-12 education system instructs and embraces the historical and cultural significance of AAPI's within Alaska. An inclusive approach to our learning will develop well rounded Alaska residents who will value and respect the true diversity that our beautiful state embodies.

Maraming Salamat for your consideration.

In solidarity,

Alma Manabat Parker