

INTRODUCTION

My name is Mai Zong Vue, a community member of the Hmong community. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my concerns about the closing of KH! As a community member, I am making the time to appear before you, a Committee that can be impactful in the policy that you make, because I believe that the closing of KH will not only impact me, the elders or Hmong community only, but you and all citizens in Dane County individually and policy wise.

With a heavy heart, I could not sleep the last couple of nights thinking about what I would like to share with you and what approach I should take tonight. Do I give you a sugar coated version so you will still say hi to me when you see me on the street, or do I tell you the KH's reality?

I came to America as a teenager. I have been a strong advocate for the poor and voiceless, using a soft approach. However, tonight, I feel that I am too young to bury my elders should they commit suicide because they have no KH to keep their hopes alive so I apologize in advance for sharing the reality of KH. As our leaders and policy makers of Dane County, I want to help you to help us make

KH available for our Hmong veterans and widows because it is the right thing to do!

HISTORY

As you may know, **the Hmong and Cambodian came to America as refugees.** We are the product of the Vietnam War, a war that was unpopular even in America.

Wisconsin is home to the 3rd largest Hmong in America. Dane County has over 5000 Hmong. Our community is very young, over 47% are under the ages of 17, according to the 2010 census. Dane County has the highest Cambodian group in WI.

The Hmong and Cambodian elders who are both veterans and widows from the Vietnam War in Madison were the lucky one in America since the establishment of the Cambodian Temple in late 90's and KH in the early 2000. Every day, the elders are greeted with a Hmong driver who pick up and drop off the elders; they receive counseling, case management, and other public services in their native language; they are fed a home cook Hmong meal at lunch; and they are surrounded their Hmong peers who can support them.

Before 1989, due to language and culture barriers, our elders would stay at home and stare outside through the windows while their adult children went to

work and grandchildren went to school. Life was hopeless, stressful and full of anxiety.

WHAT IS KH and the Cambodian Temple?

Over the years, KH & Cambodian Temple became the prevention of suicide for the most vulnerable elders. They are the prevention of many emergency visits to the hospital. They are the prevention of many child abuse cases. KH & the Temple strength the economic and tax contributions of our working SEA adults. Mostly, KH's reputation as the best practice for Hmong elderly put Journey MHC and Dane County on the map in America. KH's was replicated as a best practices in California and other states. We—the county, leaders like you, Hmong individuals, County Executive and then Rep. Tammie Baldwin, Journey MHC and Judy Wilcox, to name a few--were known for having caring leaders in Dane County. Thanks to leaders like you in our county board system, KH has been a leader in providing culturally and linguistically appropriate services for its elders and enhance the caring reputation in our community and Dane County.

WHAT DOES KH MEAN TO US—ITS IMPACT

In comparison to other elderly sites in Dane County, it is an embarrassment for me to go to the physical space where KH is at Mendota Mental Health Institute. While in other elderly settings it is the norm that the carpet is new and clean daily; the furniture is new with comfortable; the space is decorative and inviting; there is air conditioning in the summer; the heating system works properly in the winter to avoid over heating (I often find myself trying to open the old windows or the elders could die from heat exhaustion); nice and clean certified kitchen; and a lock down system where doors can be locked adequately during a crisis, at KH not of these exist as KH is housed at an old building at Mendota Mental Health Institute. KH does not offer cosmetically comfort, healthy environment free from lead, and safety, but the Hmong elders, veterans and widows, did not mind because it is their only home away from home. KH is what kept them alive and gives them hope. Every day, they can't wait to be picked up and come to be with their Hmong peers and reflect on their difficult journey to America as a healing art for them.

To me I saw how poorly our elders were treated environmentally and physically but mentally KH is the place that stabilizes their pain and suffering from the Vietnam War. How can I not be happy for them when they can laugh like a kid again when they are at KH?

So once a week during women's group since 2000, I was immune to the poor and unhealthy conditions at KH just like the elders do after so many deaf ears from management at Journey each time I try to raise the issues. I continue to tolerate the summer heat, 90 plus degrees, with the elders until individual AC units were installed recently.

In addition, I put up with the lack of support for KH staff, especially professional development. Every Monday evening, I pretend and ignore the hole that is bigger than my head in the women's bathroom although moles were growing in the hole. It greets me and says please patch me up each time I walk to wash my hands at the nearby sink. I sadly ignore the cook's gentle cry and quiet complaint about having no stove to cook on site. Instead, she has to haul the food and drive to the FEED Kitchen on Sherman Avenue, cook and then bring the cooked foods back to KH at Mendota Mental Health Institute for the elders.

Despite all these challenges KH was still a place that stabilizes trauma and PTSD and gives hopes for our elders. We tolerate it and think of no ill intent from Journey.

CONSEQUENCES OR IMPACT OF CLOSING DOWN KH

On August 8, the bomb was dropped to KH staff that KH will be closed as of September 28. The bad news was confirmed to the elders by their children or community members as they read the press release from Journey MHC. KH staff was told not to share the news with the elders. To date, the elders are still waiting to hear officially from Journey, for elders were told that Journey's CEO will meet with them on Tuesday, August 14. Come August 14, the CEO chose to meet with only KH staff.

The closing announcement of KH trigger many negative emotions for our elders, families and community.

Elder Reactions to closing of KH

For our elders, the news of closing KH, their only home away from home, trigger war feelings. They feel like they were chased out of Dane County just like when they were being chased by their enemies with a gun shots after the U.S. withdrew its troop in 1975.

The only difference this time and then is that then they were running to save their life, but this time, they were chased with the weapon of no respect for them as human beings, causing many to think about taking their own life for the government to bury them. They want to die and let history be told that their

leaders in Dane County no longer care for their lives. You will hear from the staff and an elder later tonight.

Despite the elders' inabilities to speak and understand English, they can feel the social injustice towards them as they burst out their frustrations in tears when I met with them. They asked: Does Journey treat other elders like us? Do other elders get a 30 day notice like us? If there is no more KH, we rather die for the government to bury us because it is them that caused us country less, our husbands were killed, leaving us as widows.

Community Reaction

After I got back from vacation, I called the CEO and tried to get a sense of what just happened. What was the basis for dropping a bomb to our elders and community? It was shared that KH continues to incur deficit for Journey since 2013 and the board had made a decision to close KH down.

Whether the deficit claim is true or not, Journey showed a positive revenue in 2017 when I checked its annual report. Regardless, it was clear to me that Journey is moving toward a clinical-hospital base model, a model that is about billable numbers that would bring in profit, not about the lives of human beings, no longer a communal approach.

As Journey MHC moves towards a model of profit over human life, the questions that should concern us all are:

1. Journey is one of the largest mental health providers that receives county fund, a federal pass through fund from the state to the Dane County. Does this new model meet federal requirements or a model that supports Dane County's mental effort or the Zero suicide vision of the state?
2. Does Journey's deficit has to with the handful of new and old directors? Does the cost of its new facility, a center that is less accessible to the poor and driverless, contribute to Journey's annual deficit?
3. Is KH, a communal best practice approach, the first domino to fall within this clinical model? I don't know....but time will tell.
4. Is this the new model that Dane County Human Services approve and is heading?

Regardless, Journey, like any organization, has a right to make profit if they choose to. I understand and respect that. However, closing KH in 30 days is socially unjust and morally wrong. Even if I have the resource to sustain KH, it is impossible to develop a new program and maintain services in 30 days, especially a program that serves over 400 SEA clients.

Why do the leaders of Journey acted on a 30-day notice that has no emergency plans for its elderly clients. Where is the compassion and social justice in this decision?

To me, it feels like the anti-immigrant sentiment has reached Dane County, a county that prides itself with progressive leaders. This new model is not how many hearts we can we heal or how many family can we strengthen, but how much money can bill for. Is this what Dane County is about?

As refugees, there is dignity and motivation to fight and survive as we were chased by our enemies with guns in their hands, but there is no respect or the will to live when one is chased with profit over hope. Physically our elders may have no strength, but every breath that they can take and their physical beings are our history, experience, and hope.

Ladies and gentlemen of the HHS Committee, the impact of having no KH for our elders are beyond words. The announcement of such closing already trigger more PTSD, sleepless nights and suicidal thoughts for many.

Most importantly, the closing of KH is not only about the feeling of abandonment and lack of respect for the elderly and the Hmong community, rather this closing is about the social injustice towards the poor, the voiceless,

and the test of your leadership going forward. As our leaders, are you about profit or human kindness?

Thank you for your time!