

PRESS RELEASE

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Governor Vetoes Bill to Provide Fairness in the Courts Asian American Civil Rights Organizations Express Outrage

SACRAMENTO – On Saturday, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger vetoed AB 2302 (Judiciary Committee), legislation that would have expanded access to fairness and justice for limited English proficient individuals in the judicial system. This measure was strongly supported by Asian Americans for Civil Rights and Equality.

Asian Americans for Civil Rights and Equality (AACRE) is a collaborative of CAA | Center for Asian American Advocacy, Asian Pacific American Legal Center, and Asian Law Caucus, dedicated to advocating on behalf of California's diverse Asian Pacific Americans (APAs). APAs represent 14% of the state's population. More than one-third of APAs are limited English proficient, including greater than one-half of Vietnamese, Hmong, Taiwanese, Cambodian, Laotian, and Korean communities having limited English proficiency. In addition, greater than one-third of Vietnamese, Taiwanese, Korean, Hmong, Chinese, and Thai communities are linguistically isolated, defined as households where no member 14 years or older speaks English "very well."

The judicial process can be complex, and even the most straight forward proceeding can require a command of specific legal terms and knowledge of an often confusing legal process. The provision of interpreters in civil courts would have enabled limited English proficient Californians to communicate and understand legal proceedings, involving important areas such as child custody, domestic violence, and elder abuse. With access to interpreters, the judicial system could also have achieved greater efficiencies and reduced delays as language barriers were removed.

"With his veto, Governor Schwarznegger sends the wrong message that there should not be fairness in the courts for 7 million Californians requiring language assistance," declared Karin Wang, Vice President of Programs at Asian Pacific American Legal Center. "For too long, the lack of interpreters in civil courts has been a fundamental flaw in our judicial system, resulting in unequal access to the courts for limited English proficient Californians. AB 2302 was an opportunity to improve the judicial process for all Californians."

"Just as courts could not operate without a judge, it is an outrage that courts are operating without interpreters for cases with significant impact on people's lives," said Gen Fujioka, Interim Executive Director of Asian Law Caucus. "Interpreters are necessary for clients to understand the legal proceedings, thereby improving navigation of the complex system and reducing delays."

"We applaud the leadership of the Assembly Judiciary Committee, especially Committee Chair Assembly Member Dave Jones, in proposing a solution to address this important civil rights issue, but are gravely disappointed that the Governor failed to address this fundamental barrier to justice by vetoing this legislation," stated Luna Yasui, Policy Director at CAA | Center for Asian American Advocacy.

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