



SEARAC Urges Lawmakers to vote NO on HR 6691 Community Safety and Security Act of 2018

The Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC) advocates for the largest refugee community to ever resettle in the United States. More than one million refugees from Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam came to this country as survivors of war and genocide in the aftermath of the US occupation in Southeast Asia in the 1970s. To this day, our community continues to be disproportionately impacted by mass incarceration and unjust mandatory detention and deportation policy, stemming from the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) that expanded the definition of “aggravated felony.” This impacts many Southeast Asian American (SEAA) community members who had been living in the country as lawful permanent residents.

SEARAC urges lawmakers to stand with SEAA communities by voting NO on HR 6691

This proposal is an unnecessary measure that would expand the already broad definition of “crime of violence,” making more immigrants vulnerable to mandatory detention and deportation. Since 1998, at least 16,000 SEAA community members have received final orders of deportation to the countries they originally fled. More than 13,000 of these were based on old criminal records (78% of total SEAA deportation orders, compared to 29% of all immigrants with deportation orders),¹ mainly due to the expansion of the “aggravated felony” category under IIRIRA.

These community members came to this country as refugee children and were raised as Americans. Upon arrival into the United States, many were resettled into struggling neighborhoods. Still coping with significant trauma from war and genocide, these refugees made mistakes as teenagers and young adults and were funneled into the criminal justice system. Many of them served their time and transformed their lives to become productive community members, business owners, and loving parents supporting their US citizen families. Due to unjust, punitive, and expansive detention and deportation laws, these individuals become subjected to cruel, harsh, and unfair double jeopardy in the form of incarceration and deportation years—and even decades—later.

SEARAC opposes mandatory black-or-white policies that fail to take into consideration the individual circumstances of a person, before mandating detention and removal. A vote for HR 6691 broadens our already expansive federal criminal code. It will unnecessarily expand mass incarceration while

¹ Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, “U.S. Deportation Outcomes by Charge, Completed Cases in Immigration Courts”: http://trac.syr.edu/phptools/immigration/court_backlog/deport_outcome_charge.php

doing nothing to increase public safety. It is for these reasons that we urge you to vote NO on H.R. 6691 Community Safety and Security Act of 2018.