



Cia Siab, Inc.

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Office: (608) 615 - 7117 | M-F 9:00 AM - 5:00 PM

24/7 WI Hmong Family Strengthening Helpline 1 (877) 740-4292

August 19, 2022

Clerk of Supreme Court
Attention: Deputy Clerk-Rules
P.O. Box 1688
Madison, WI 53701-1688

RE: Petition 22-03 Eviction Record Retention

Dear Honorable Justices,

I am the founder and Executive Director of Cia Siab, Inc., the only fully bilingual, bicultural social services agency serving the Hmoob (Hmong) community in La Crosse County. Our agency was founded in 2016 with a mission to provide culturally empowering advocacy to the Hmoob community, with an emphasis on assisting victims of crime, including domestic violence and sexual assault.

One of the most common difficult-to-solve problems that our clients encounter is the critical lack of safe, affordable housing in our community. High costs, geographic isolation, lack of public transportation, discriminatory practices, unavailability of appropriately sized rental units, language barriers, as well as safety concerns like insufficient HVAC, mold, and toxins combine to present multilevel daily challenges for Hmoob people of all ages. We provide ongoing technical training to our staff about how to best assist survivors in navigating the existing, insufficient web of housing and support services. Our staff are knowledgeable and caring but are currently very limited in the type of assistance they can offer to clients facing homelessness, unsafe housing conditions, and crises that affect their ability to stay safely at home. Finding and maintaining safe, adequate housing is the most complex and enduring challenge our advocates and survivors face together. The disproportionately high rates of domestic violence, sexual assault, and murder-suicides in the Hmoob community also make it one of the most dangerous. This already very difficult task is made nearly impossible when family members have a history of eviction.

In an effort to help our clients, especially those who are seeking to rebuild their lives after leaving abusive homes, we are writing in full support of Legal Action's Petition 22-03 related to reducing the length of time eviction records are held. Limiting the amount of time that eviction records are held will help restore some balance in the landlord-tenant relationship, which has become woefully lopsided in recent years, and will also provide necessary protection and assistance to victims of crime.

Hmoob families in our state already face an uphill climb finding rental properties that will accommodate their cultural needs and larger-than-average families. They face difficulties communicating with landlords and property managers, who often refuse to provide any language support for non-English speakers, and who sometimes fail to explain why they are refusing someone's housing application or declining to renew a lease. Clients with eviction histories are especially vulnerable to mistreatment by landlords, homelessness, and/or continued abuse if they are unable to secure new housing.

At Cia Siab, Inc. we work closely with clients to help them secure safe, affordable housing and can offer financial assistance to anyone who needs it. Despite a guarantee of rent and free, unlimited assistance with communication, landlords frequently refuse to show properties to our clients, even when they do not

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have eviction records. For clients with eviction histories or criminal records, there seems to be no amount of current information (monthly income, recent rental references, other evidence of significant changes in circumstance) that will convince most landlords to take a chance. As a result, clients often end up staying with extended family members for long periods of time, forcing everyone to fit into homes that are too small, that pose known health risks, and/or that exacerbate family histories of abuse.

Due to high generational poverty and low educational attainment in the Hmoob community, it's not uncommon for Hmoob people in Wisconsin to experience inadequate housing for their entire lives: to grow up in overcrowded apartments as children; move into dilapidated apartments as young adults; share expenses and space with extended family as they and their siblings raise their own children; and to eventually retire into a shabby studio apartment far from the shopping and community supports on which they rely. Poor living conditions negatively affect their physical and mental health at every age, and can have disastrous and sometimes fatal results for people who are unable to disrupt the cycle due to previous evictions. You have the power to help.

On behalf of Cia Siab, Inc. and Legal Action, [I urge you to adopt Petition 22-03](#) to reduce the harm of eviction records by reducing the length of time they are held from 20 years to 1 year in most cases. Thank you for providing us with the opportunity to provide comment and context concerning this important proposed rule.

Sincerely,

Dr. Xong Xiong

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