

Pritzker Recognizes Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month In Illinois

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SPRINGFIELD – The State of Illinois today announced a series of events and resources to be offered during May’s National Asian American and Pacific Island (AAPI) Heritage Month. Hosted by the Illinois Department of Commerce (DCEO) Office of Minority Economic Empowerment (OMEE), events feature a wide variety of topics geared toward supporting the growth of AAPI and minority-owned businesses throughout Illinois.

Additionally, in a move to extend support to AAPI businesses as well as communities throughout the month, Governor JB Pritzker also issued a proclamation recognizing the contributions of Illinois' 21,000 AAPI-owned small businesses and the role they play in our communities and the Illinois economy.

“Throughout the state, our Asian American and Pacific Islander residents and businesses are essential to the fabric of our communities and play a key role in building a 21st century economy,” **said Gov. Pritzker**. “Unfortunately, we know all too well that these same valued residents have faced disproportionate and hateful attacks – during the pandemic and well before it – and this has put an especially tough burden on our small business owners and entrepreneurs. As we prioritize a swift economic recovery from COVID-19, we are committed to ensuring equity is at the forefront of our response and that AAPI businesses receive the support needed to thrive this month and all year round.”

Throughout the month of May, DCEO will be hosting business webinars that will feature participation by community and civic leaders, elected officials and policymakers at the state, federal and local level - all working to elevate opportunities for AAPI businesses and residents to succeed in Illinois. A full list of the events can be found below.

“DCEO is committed to creating an inclusive environment that helps businesses of all types and sizes prosper,” **said DCEO Acting Director Sylvia Garcia**. “We are excited to celebrate Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage month by honoring the contributions of the AAPI community in Illinois and expanding opportunities to help AAPI businesses recover from the pandemic and thrive well into the future.”

Events for businesses begin next week and are free to join. More information on how to register is found below, or on DCEO's website.

- **May 12, 2021 at 11:00 a.m., “Women’s Webinar Wednesday: Business Growth Opportunities for AAPI Community [Register](#)**

Join the SBA and DCEO-OMEE for a presentation on resources exclusively marketed for AAPI- and women-owned businesses by discussing ways to access business growth opportunities.

- **May 20, 2021 at noon, “Addressing Anti-Asian Hate and Supporting the AAPI Business Community” [Register](#)**

AAPI-owned businesses nationwide have been targeted disproportionately and suffered significant loss during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Stop AAPI Hate,

between March 2020 and February 2021, Asian-owned businesses were the primary site of AAPI discrimination with 35.4% of reported incidents. Join a series of business and community leaders for a discussion on how to support AAPI businesses in Illinois amid the trying times.

- **May 25, 2021 at 11:00 a.m., “Fireside Chat: AAPI Business Leaders Thriving Across Illinois** [Register](#)

Hear from a group of small businesses throughout the state as they share their experiences, including barriers they have overcome, success stories, ways they have leveraged resources and how we can work to ensure that Illinois is a place where AAPI businesses can thrive.

- **May 26, 2021 at 10:00 a.m., “OMEE & Illinois SBDC Network Presents: Advancing the Development of Minority Entrepreneurship (ADME) – Marketing Strategies”** [Register](#)

Join DCEO and the SBDC Chinese Mutual Aid Association (CMAA) for a workshop on marketing strategies tailored to AAPI businesses to help increase your visibility and market share.

- **May 27, 2021 at 9:00 a.m., “World Trade Month: Doing Business in China”** [Register](#)

Crossing over in May’s World Trade Month, DCEO will make its Office of Trade and Investment available to lead an expert panel, including Chinese exporting agencies, providing an overview of opportunities, trends, challenges, and resources for Illinois business interested in the Chinese marketplace. Presentations will be in English, but slides will include both English and Mandarin and panelists are prepared to answer questions in either language.

- **May 28, 2021 at noon, “Navigating the Benefits of the American Rescue Plan for AAPI Small Businesses and Avoiding Predatory Lending”**

US Sen. Tammy Duckworth joins DCEO Acting Director Garcia for opening remarks and a conversation on the latest federal stimulus enacted, the American Rescue Plan Act. Join this conversation with representatives from the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), Small Business Majority, the Consumer Fraud Bureau, and the AAPI Constituent Advocate who will highlight how federal, state, and local partners can support AAPI businesses in accessing funding and technical assistance.

“AAPI Heritage Month is an important time to celebrate the contributions of our AAPI community and the important role they play here in Illinois and across the country – with over 1.9 small businesses across the U.S.,” **said Geraldine "Geri" Sanchez Aglipay Midwest Director/National Women's Entrepreneurship Director, Small Business Majority.** “As engines of neighborhood commerce, economic activity, and job creation across the United States and in Illinois, AAPI small businesses must be included in the conversation addressing the racial inequities that are holding us back. For this reason and more, we must support them this month and all year round, and I am proud to join the state of Illinois in shining a light on the challenges and opportunities facing this community.”

Recognizing that minority-owned businesses have faced a disproportionate impact during the pandemic, the State of Illinois made it a priority to provide targeted resources from day one. DCEO invested to launch the successful community navigator model last year to help connect business owners and entrepreneurs from minority communities to resources, and to provide support to them in applying for state and federal opportunities. As a result, \$48 million – or 17 percent of the total funds - has gone to over 1,600 AAPI businesses through the Business Interruption Grant (BIG) program alone – the nation’s largest of its kind economic support program, created by Gov. Pritzker and the General Assembly.

“Throughout AAPI Heritage Month, we not only celebrate the contributions of the AAPI community, but we also take a moment to honor our rich history, and recognize the struggles that our communities have faced,” **said State Rep. Theresa Mah (D-Chicago).** “For too long the AAPI community has been overlooked, and I commend the Pritzker administration for ensuring that business and community support is equitable. As the first Asian American elected to the General Assembly, and a member of Illinois’ Asian American Caucus, I ask residents across the state to join in celebrating National Asian American and Pacific Island (AAPI) Heritage Month to recognize the impact Asian Americans have on the Illinois economy and to take a stand against racial intolerance that has been directed at so many in the AAPI community.”

“Thank you, Governor Pritzker, for recognizing AAPI Heritage Month and for investing in resources to ensure equity is a priority not only for COVID-19 business assistance but beyond,” **said State Sen. Ram Villivalam (D-Chicago).** “Supporting our minority-owned small businesses is more critical now than ever, as they have lacked access to funding and opportunities that other business owners have utilized. I encourage AAPI businesses to join the conversation through the month-long events planned by DCEO and tailored to provide direct support and guidance on opportunities for the community at both the state and federal levels. Much work is still needed to fully include our communities in relief efforts, and I am happy to see Governor Pritzker taking the lead.”

There are several emergency relief programs still underway by the federal government, including the Shuttered Venue Operators Grant, Restaurant Revitalization Fund, and the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP). To support more AAPI and minority-owned businesses in accessing funds and being represented in these programs, the Department is partnering with community navigator organizations to spread the word about funding opportunities and to offer hands-on support with the application process.

“Many AAPI small businesses and other businesses of color have been left out of the recovery despite their significant contributions to our economy,” **said Rebecca Shi, Executive Director of the American Business Immigration Coalition.** “ABIC's community navigator technical assistance program with DCEO that President Biden has nationalized in the American Recovery Plan is key to helping them rebuild and recover. That's why we are proud to partner with the Illinois Department of Commerce to ensure that AAPI businesses and other businesses of color have the resources and assistance they need to survive and thrive in the Pandemic.”

To support AAPI businesses year-round, DCEO offers a vast network of small business support programs. This includes the Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs) network – with over 40 locations around the state. DCEO recently celebrated 2020 as a record year for the SBDCS, with over 41,000 businesses receiving advising supports during the pandemic. DCEO joined the Chinese Mutual Aid Association in Uptown – the State's first Asian American focused SBDC.

Approved “This May, we are proud to join Gov. Pritzker in celebrating the indelible contributions our Asian American and Pacific Islander residents and businesses in Chicago and throughout Illinois,” **said Dennis Mondero, Chinese Mutual Aid Association Executive Director.** “CMAA SBDC is proud to serve the Asian American community in Illinois, and we are grateful for the administration's continued support and focus on outreach to meet all of our small businesses where they are. We look forward to engaging with DCEO and our many partners this month and beyond to extend resources to support a strong recovery from the pandemic.”

For more on AAPI Heritage Month and how to sign up for events in May, please visit [DCEO's website](#). For updates on other small business supports available, call the First Stop hotline at 1.800.252.2923, or follow us @IllinoisDCEO for updates on programs.