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February 14, 2021

Via emails: Cityclerk@cityofmerced.org

RE: FEBRUARY 16, 2020 CITY COUNCIL MEETING AGENDA ITEM: J. REPORTING, J.1. 21-123, C.: "Naming the future park site located at Freemark Avenue and Heitz Way, General Vang Pao Park, with the future playground at the same site to be named Aletha June Playground as recommended by the Recreation and Parks Commission"

Dear Honorable Mayor Serratto and Distinguished Merced City Councilmembers:

I write to provide my strongest support for the Recreation and Parks Commission's recommendation to name the **future park site located at Freemark Avenue and Heitz Way, General Vang Pao Park**, with the future playground at the same site to be named Aletha June Playground.

Currently, I am attorney who resides in Sacramento, but I have and continue to hold Merced as my home. I grew up in Merced and graduated from Merced High School in 1989. A large population of Merced residents, both of Hmong and non-Hmong heritage, are my families, relatives, and friends. As such, in addition to representing clients at the Merced Superior Court, I frequented Merced often, at and during various cultural, social, and entertainment events.

The contributions of General Vang Pao and the Hmong people to the wealth, richness, and pride to America, America's history are well-known and undeniable. General Vang Pao and the Hmong fought against communism and fought for and defended American democracy and values during the Vietnam War. The Hmong sacrificed thousands of lives to rescue downed American pilots, gathered enemy intelligence, and fought the North Vietnamese communists with American soldiers and fighter pilots.

Over the last 45 years as Americans, we continued to sacrifice and defend American democracy and values. Many of our children followed their father's and grandfather's footsteps by serving in America's military corps. Several have become high ranking U.S. military officers – all due to the example of the late General Vang Pao.

Further, the Hmong have become an integral part of the social, cultural, educational, political, and economic fabric of the Merced community. Merced is home to hundreds of Hmong professionals – in all fields: lawyers, medical doctors, chiropractor, pharmacist, business owners, professors, teachers, city/county employees, and the first Hmong judge in the country.

Moreover, access to community parks is important to the health and well-being of the community, including and especially the Hmong.

Therefore, naming a future Merced community park in the name of the late General Vang Pao is only fitting but long overdue. It will provide a clear message that inclusion and diversity is valued. The Hmong's contribution to America's values and greatness is appreciated and recognized.

In conclusion, I strongly urge the honorable mayor and councilmembers to accept and approve the Recreation and Parks Commission's recommendation to name the future park site located at Freemark Avenue and Heitz Way, General Vang Pao Park, with the future playground at the same site to be named Aletha June Playground.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Kou T. Xiong

Cc: Mayor Matthew Serratto (via email: SerrattoM@Cityofmerced.org)

Councilmembers:

1. Jesse Ornales (via email: OrnelasJ@Cityofmerced.org)
2. Fernando Echevarria (via email: EchevarriaF@Cityofmerced.org)
3. Bertha Perez (via email: PerezB@Cityofmerced.org)
4. Kevin Blake (via email: BlakeK@Cityofmerced.org)
5. Sarah Boyle (via email: BoyleS@Cityofmerced.org)
6. Delray Shelton (via email: SheltonD@Cityofmerced.org)

Merced Hmong Leaders:

1. Chue Wang Xiong (via email: [REDACTED])
2. Moua Thao (via email: [REDACTED])