

**ASIAN AMERICAN LEGAL DEFENSE AND EDUCATION FUND
MEDIA RELEASE**

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**AALDEF COMMENDS IOWA SCHOOL DISTRICT'S NEW ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER
CLASSIFICATION POLICY**

New York, NY – Addressing criticism from the misclassification of Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF) client Lori Phanachone as an English Language Learner (ELL), Storm Lake School District has created a comprehensive new ELL classification policy. Storm Lake will retroactively apply this new policy, which sets forth clear steps for identification and classification of ELL students as well as parental notice, to the approximately 1,000 ELLs currently enrolled in Storm Lake public schools.

Khin Mai Aung, the AALDEF staff attorney representing Ms. Phanachone, said: “We are heartened by Storm Lake’s willingness to improve its ELL classification policy. Moving forward, we will monitor how Storm Lake applies this new policy to current students who – like Lori Phanachone – may have been misclassified as ELLs.”

Storm Lake erroneously classified Ms. Phanachone, a Lao American student with a 3.98 GPA, as an ELL without assessing her actual English ability. This spring, the honors student protested Storm Lake’s faulty classification by boycotting a yearly ELL test, resulting in a 3 day suspension, revocation of her National Honor Society membership and extracurricular privileges, as well as a threat of further discipline. After AALDEF’s intervention, Storm Lake agreed to reclassify Ms. Phanachone as English proficient, lift all disciplinary consequences from her record, and restore her National Honors Society membership.

Lori Phanachone said: “I’m glad my taking a stand has led Storm Lake to improve its ELL classification policy. Now, other students who were misclassified under the old policy will have a chance to be reclassified as English proficient.”

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The Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF), founded in 1974, is a national organization that protects and promotes the civil rights of Asian Americans. By combining litigation, advocacy, education and organizing, AALDEF works with Asian American communities across the country to secure human rights for all.