

Legislation Text

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Commending Gayle Isa for her 25 years of service to and leadership of Asian Arts Initiative, and honoring Asian Arts Initiative's transformative contribution to Chinatown, to Philadelphia's Asian American Community, and to the entire City of Philadelphia.

WHEREAS, For 25 years, Asian Arts Initiative, a multidisciplinary arts center that aims to cultivate innovative models for artists to engage with local communities through exhibitions, performances, and community projects, has served as a bedrock of Philadelphia's Chinatown Community; and

WHEREAS, In 1992, amid a burst of creativity within the Asian American Community and a need for creative spaces dealing with intersectional views on race, class, and culture, the Painted Bride Art Center established the Asian Arts Initiative to provide space for Philadelphia's Asian American Community to explore neighborhood dynamics and social activism through creative and performing arts; and

WHEREAS, Gayle Isa, a Southern California native and Swarthmore College student, joined the organization in 1993 as its first intern and planned Philadelphia's first ever Asian American arts festival. A year later, Isa became the organization's first Executive Director; and

WHEREAS, Since 1993, Asian Arts Initiative has been at the forefront of exploring the intersection of creative practice and critical, community-based dialogue in the City of Philadelphia, in an effort to move the dial on racial equity and to provide artists and young people with the tools to explore the Asian American experience; and

WHEREAS, Asian Arts Initiative's programming has featured Artists Exchange, a yearly series of workshops and exhibitions that support Asian American artists as they explore issues within their communities and relevant social themes, and the Youth Arts Workshop, which provides artistic opportunities and a safe space for Asian American youth and fellow students from all backgrounds to interrogate their conceptions of and experiences with community; and

WHEREAS, The growth of Asian Arts Initiative is emblematic of the complex geography of Chinatown, a neighborhood bordered by massive, growing development which has survived due to the persistence and advocacy of community activists. Asian Arts Initiative's acquisition of state grants and a successful capital campaign speaks to their Executive Director's political acumen and fundraising skills; and

WHEREAS, Asian Arts Initiative has been home to countless exhibitions and gatherings and has consistently supported innovative programming that engages its visitors with the complexities of how race shapes communities and how communities shape racial identity in the U.S.; and

WHEREAS, Asian Arts Initiative has been a launching pad for Asian American artists and other artists of color to find a supportive and welcoming home to promote and celebrate their work, including its Social Practice Lab, which has given artists space for experimentation with methods and processes that uses art to tackle community development, gentrification, and self-determination; and

WHEREAS, Asian Arts Initiative is currently celebrating its 25th anniversary with the “Then and Now” exhibition, which highlights efforts to promote community building in Asian American communities over the course of AAI’s existence; and

WHEREAS, In 25 years, Isa built the Asian Arts Initiative from a small program housed in the Painted Bride Art Center to an independent, nationally-recognized nonprofit that has pioneered award-winning programming and serves as the hub for critical community arts and social practice; and

WHEREAS, Isa, who currently serves as a member of the Philadelphia Mayor’s Commission on Asian American Affairs, the Mayor’s Cultural Advisory Council, and was the first Asian American appointed to serve on the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, believes in “the healing and transformative power of the arts to bring people together”; and

WHEREAS, As Asian Arts Initiative celebrates both its 25th anniversary and the tenure Executive Director Isa, we honor the deep positive impact of the arts in promoting cross-cultural understanding and facilitating critical, intersectional dialogue; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Commends Gayle Isa for her 25 years of service to the Asian Arts Initiative, and honoring Asian Arts Initiative’s transformative contribution to Chinatown, to Philadelphia’s Asian American Community, and to the entire City of Philadelphia.