



## **Asian American Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander HERITAGE MONTH**

**Michael Castilla  
Division Director, Vocational Services Program**

### ***How do you identify within the Asian American and Pacific Islander community?***

**My mother is Chinese American. She was born in New York City Chinatown. My grandparents immigrated from Toison, China. Growing up, I was very close with them. They would take care of me while my parents worked. I am also very close with my Chinese American aunts, uncles, and cousins. My father is from Arecibo, Puerto Rico. My cousins on my dad's side would refer to me and my sister as the "Chino Ricans."**

### ***How did you find your way to the Bay Area?***

**My uncle moved to the Bay Area when he was 25 years old. Growing up I would visit him and his family almost every summer. I grew to love the Bay Area where there were many people like me that were of mixed heritage. They even had a term for us, called Hapa. I always felt a part of the community here in the Bay Area, especially in Oakland. I lived in Queens New York and I felt Oakland had a lot of similarities, minus the cold winters. I moved out here in 2003 to work at a non-profit agency. My goal was to work a few years and return to New York. Instead, I met my wife and together we have an amazing family and life here in Oakland.**

**My wife came to Oakland from Vietnam when she was a teenager. She graduated from Oakland High and is a teacher in the Oakland Unified School District. My kids are growing up in a multi-cultural home that consists of Chinese, Vietnamese, and Puerto Rican heritages. Yet, their favorite food is hot dogs from Costco.**

### ***How has your heritage shaped the person you are today?***

**I was very close with my grandparents. They have an "immigrant" mentality and really showed me how to appreciate things in life; to work hard, don't complain, love your family, and to persevere.**

**Who are the role models or mentors that have influenced you or helped guide you?**

**I have and have had many role models in my life that I owe a lot to. For this question, I will talk about my grandfather. He was a man with strong convictions. He worked hard and he didn't let any setbacks bring him down. He truly believed that working hard was how to get ahead in life. He escaped the wars in China by sneaking into the United States. At the time there was the Chinese Exclusion Act, but he didn't let that stop him. When he arrived, he was drafted and fought the Germans in Africa during World War II. He had less than \$20 to his name and managed to become an extremely successful businessman. My family owes a lot to him and to my grandmother for their sacrifices. One time he told me that I should work Monday through Saturday and that I should only work half a day on Sunday so that I have time to enjoy life. He was not joking when he told me that. That was the kind of work ethic he had.**

### ***What brings you joy about your heritage and culture?***

**I love my family and the celebrations we have together, such as the Lunar New Year, and the Moon festival. I love the traditions and ceremonies that we celebrate. Most importantly, I appreciate the sacrifices my family has made to get us to where we are today. I strive to honor them by continuing their efforts to ensure that my kids will have the same opportunity and work ethic to succeed and to provide that opportunity for their children and so on.**



**Behavioral Health  
Department**  
Alameda County Health