



February 3, 2016

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

Kheir Center is honored and proud to support the nomination of the late Colonel Young Oak Kim for the 2016 Presidential Medal of Freedom. His heroic service in the United States Army and his pioneering leadership in underserved communities deem him a meritorious American citizen.

Kheir Center (Korean Health, Education, Information and Research Center) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit service agency, providing culturally and linguistically-sensitive health care and human services to the uninsured and underserved residents of Los Angeles for the past 30 years. Colonel Young Oak Kim was one of Kheir's founders in 1986. Kheir, a Federally Qualified Health Center, currently operates two clinics that have the capacity to provide more than 75,000 patient visits annually, including critically important primary and preventive care services such as cancer screenings, immunizations, family planning, behavioral health, mammography, x-rays, pediatrics and other essential services at low or no cost. Kheir is the only FQHC in the entire country that serves a majority Korean patient base, with all services available in English, Korean and Spanish to ensure linguistically appropriate service the diverse Koreatown community.

Born in 1919 to immigrant parents, Colonel Young Oak Kim was a valiant Korean American war hero served in the U. S. Army during World War II & the Korean War. During World War II, Kim served as the only Korean American in the famous Japanese American unit, the 100<sup>th</sup> Battalion/442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team. The Army offered him a transfer due to fears of ethnic conflict, but he refused, declaring, "There is no Japanese or Korean here. We're all Americans and we're fighting for the same cause." This sentiment underscored Kim's character, having the valor of a warrior with a heart of benevolence.

Throughout his military career, Young Oak Kim earned several awards, including the U.S. Distinguished Service Cross, but he remained a humble global citizen. The Korean War was the first time Kim had been in Korea, and he felt the need to give back to his origins. While serving in Seoul, he led his battalion in adopting an orphanage of over 500 children, who grew up to be successful innovators and leaders in the workforce.

After his retirement from an exemplary military career in 1972, Kim dedicated his life to serving minorities, youth, and the poor in his native Southern California. He was active in working with Special Services for Groups, a non-profit service organization that promoted equal opportunities for vulnerable minorities. He became a founding member of numerous non-profit organizations in the region, including the Korean American Museum; the Korean American Coalition; and the Korean Health, Education, Information and Research Center. When he was on the board of the United Way Los Angeles Chapter, he added the organization's programs for the Japanese, Filipino, Vietnamese, and Korean American communities. Kim was also chairman of the Center for Asian Pacific Families, which, under his leadership, became the largest women's shelter in Southern California in the 1990's. He was also dedicated to preserving the history of contributions of the Japanese American military units of World War II. He helped to establish the Japanese American National Museum, the Go For Broke Monument, and the Go For Broke Educational Foundation.

Col. Kim's vision to serve vulnerable populations carries on at Kheir Center, where 97% of our patients are low-income. Our patient population is a reflection of the face of Koreatown today: a diverse mix of Korean, Latino, African American, Southeast Asian and Caucasian individuals and families. We maintain Col. Kim's dedication to the communities who often suffer from cultural and linguistic isolation and lack of access to services, and we know that he would be proud to see the powerful impact that Kheir continues to have on the community.

Col. Kim passed away in 2005, but his legacy lives on through the lives he saved during his service in the U.S. Army and the impact his organizations continue to make on new generations of Americans striving to fulfill their American dream. At Kheir Center, we recognize Kim's pioneering leadership and value the altruism, courage, and commitment to equality that life's work exemplified, particularly for underserved communities. Because of his exemplary contributions to our nation, Young Oak Kim is a worthy candidate for the highest civilian award in the United States, the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Respectfully,

Erin Pak  
CEO

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