

**Statement for the Record
South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)
Discrimination and Violence Against Asian Americans
March 18, 2021**

**Submitted to
House Judiciary Committee
Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties**

March 17, 2021

Chairman Jerrold Nadler
2138 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Ranking Member Jim Jordan
2138 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

To Chairman Nadler, Ranking Member Jordan, and Members of the House Committee on the Judiciary:

South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT) submits this written testimony to the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties for its hearing titled “Discrimination and Violence Against Asian Americans” on March 18, 2021.

South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT) is a national movement strategy and advocacy organization committed to racial justice through structural change based in Washington, D.C. Nearly 5.4 million South Asians live in the United States. Our growing and diverse communities trace their roots to Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Kashmir, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and the diaspora, including but not limited to Trinidad/Tobago, Guyana, Fiji, Tanzania, and Kenya.

SAALT’s vision is to help build a South Asian American community with shared values that uplift *all* people of color, and across lines of race, caste, gender, sexuality, and religion to abolish systems of oppression and achieve collective liberation.

Since September 11th, 2001 South Asian, Sikh, Muslim, and Arab Americans have been the targets of numerous incidents of hate violence, harassment, and profiling. In addition, places of worship have been vandalized and attacked such as the tragic shooting of the Sikh gurdwara in Oak Creek, Wisconsin in 2012 and countless mosques targeted with violence, bombs, and arson. The latest wave of anti-Asian racism and hate violence is the culmination of centuries of

white supremacist imperialism, anti-Black racism, and anti-immigrant policies such as the Chinese Exclusion Act, Japanese Internment Camps, and the Muslim Ban.

As South Asians our solidarity is informed by our post 9/11 experiences. We acknowledge that the Asian American community is not a monolith and that undocumented, queer and trans, and working class communities are disproportionately impacted by institutionalized racism.

We thank the subcommittee for conducting this hearing to understand the alarming rise in discrimination, harassment, and violence against Asian Americans in the wake of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and we welcome the opportunity to share the experiences of the communities that we serve.

Structural and Historical Racism Against Asian Americans

In SAALT's first year, 20 years ago, 9/11 and the subsequent Islamophobic targeting of our communities through state and interpersonal violence shook South Asians across the U.S. In the midst of that crisis, SAALT rose both to meet the needs of the moment and to help build community infrastructure for South Asians so that the next time a crisis struck, we would have a network in place to come together and organize, act, and advocate for ourselves and our rights.

Twenty years later, the world looks different, yet so many of the underlying, structural injustices remain. The COVID-19 pandemic is raging, devastating people's lives across the U.S., and disproportionately impacting Black and brown working-class communities. Asian Americans have been facing a dual pandemic of the coronavirus and racism. Our communities have endured not only health disparities and economic hardships but also racism and xenophobia from being unjustly scapegoated for the spread of the coronavirus.

SAALT has been systematically tracking hate violence and xenophobic rhetoric targeting Muslims and those racialized as Muslim since November 2015. In March 2020, SAALT expanded its tracking to include COVID-19 related hate violence targeting Asian Americans. To date, SAALT has tracked 363 incidents of xenophobic or Islamophobic rhetoric, and 796 incidents of hate violence victimizing Muslims and Asian Americans, and those perceived as Muslim or Asian American.¹

COVID-19 Motivated Anti-Asian Hate

Black, Indigenous, and communities of color are experiencing two deadly pandemics: racism and COVID-19. Racist, xenophobic, and Islamophobic rhetoric, state-sanctioned violence, along with centuries of divestment from meaningful social services has led to a disproportionate

¹ "Acts of Hate Database." *South Asian Americans Leading Together*.
<https://saalt.org/policy-change/post-9-11-backlash/>

increase in violence against our communities.²

Attacks against Asian Americans began nearly as soon as COVID-19 arrived in the United States and have not abated since. In March 2020, an Asian American family with two children, ages 2, and 6, was stabbed in Texas. The next month, an Asian American woman in Brooklyn, New York was attacked with a substance that gave her chemical burns. Incidents of xenophobic political rhetoric, harassment, threats, and violence like these happened across the country and throughout 2020 and into the new year.

In January 2021, Vicha Ratanapakdee, a 84-year old Thai American, died after being shoved to the ground while walking in San Francisco. Later in February, Noel Quintana, a 61-year old Filipino American man, was slashed in the face during his morning commute on the New York City subway. Just yesterday six Asian American women were murdered by a white supremacist.

Over 3,000 hate crimes and hate incidents against Asian Americans were reported to Stand Against Hatred (Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC), OCA - Asian Pacific Advocates, and Stop AAPI Hate in 2020. In the past year, offenses legally classified as hate crimes against Asian Americans increased by 150% in major cities like Los Angeles and New York City; in a nationally-representative survey conducted by National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF), 50% of all Asian and Pacific Islander American who responded indicated that they had experienced anti-Asian bigotry and/or violence.³ All of these incidents constitute a disturbing pattern of violence that must be addressed.

It is crucial to note that violence and discrimination against Asian Americans have been constant throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. It is even more crucial to understand that Asian Americans have experienced structural violence and racism for decades and beyond. Our communities deserve safety and justice and demand an end to racism and white supremacy that endangers all of us.

Recommendations

SAALT is committed to advocating for policy and community based solutions that address hate violence from its root cause — by fighting all the manifestations of state sanctioned hate. We firmly believe that increased policing, surveillance, and reliance on police or law enforcement is not the answer. We join leading Asian American community groups in not asking for more law enforcement. As we've seen time and time again, more law enforcement has not led to protection and safety; in fact, it instead leads to more violence aimed at and control of Black and Brown communities.

² "Unequal Consequences: The Disparate Impact of COVID-19 Across South Asian Americans," *South Asian Americans Leading Together*. <https://bit.ly/3bWto6E>

³ "National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum Responds to Murder of Asian Women in Georgia Spa Shootings," *National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum*. <https://www.napawf.org/press-releases/031621>

We join the Asian American and Pacific Islander community in calling for investment in communities of color so that all of us have the infrastructure and resources in place for effective community safety, a robust social service safety net, and in-language support. We call on our local and state government to provide robust and responsive crisis intervention resources, including in-language support for mental health, legal, employment, and immigration services. We call for an investment in transformative justice that begins with cross racial dialogue and community-building that address the root causes of violence and hate.

We call on Congress to center the voices and leadership of Asian American women, girls and transgender and gender non-conforming communities.

We urge Congress to immediately pass the Jabara-Heyer NO HATE Act (H.R. 3545; S. 2043), which helps close vast gaps in hate crime statistics and improve data collection includes restorative justice component which provides an “alternative sentencing” provision that would allow specific defendants supervised release to undertake educational classes or community service directly related to the harmed community.

We call on the Biden administration to take tangible actions outlined in the Presidential Memorandum Condemning and Combating Racism Xenophobia and Intolerance against AAPIs.

Conclusion

We thank the Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties for bringing attention to harm that Asian American communities have been experiencing during this pandemic and for holding this hearing. We urge members of this subcommittee to bear in mind that racism and discrimination against Asian Americans did not begin with the start of the pandemic and without decisive, structural change, will persist long after the pandemic’s end. Additionally, we hope you will continue to use the power of this subcommittee to address the specific needs of not only Asian Americans but also Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders and all other communities of color that have borne the brunt of the pandemic and of centuries of racism and violence.

Sincerely,
South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)