



APIA
SCHOLARS
Educate. Elevate. Empower.

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House Committee on the Judiciary Hearing: Discrimination and Violence Against Asian Americans

Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties

APIA Scholars' Written Testimony

March 17, 2021

For nearly 20 years, APIA Scholars has been the nation's largest non-profit provider of scholarships for Asian and Pacific Islander American college students, providing a path for underserved communities to succeed and thrive. It is our mission to increase support and accelerate success for a diverse community that is made up of 50+ ethnicities and that speaks over 300 languages, many of whom are high-need yet are rendered invisible by aggregate data practices. Accordingly, we are incredibly disheartened by the recent rise in anti-Asian violence and underscore the need to dismantle the systemic racism at its heart.

This violence has been enabled by the pervasive "model minority myth" that misrepresents our communities as a monolith and is weaponized to drive a wedge between AAPIs and other communities. Despite aggregate education data that reports high AAPI attainment, household income, and employment earnings, 70 percent of our scholars live at or below the poverty level and 65 percent are the first in their families to attend college.

This violence has been intensified by hateful rhetoric at the nation's highest levels of leadership, referring to the coronavirus with racial slurs and demonizing entire communities of Americans who have not only struggled through the same pandemic as others, but have also disproportionately suffered. States with the highest numbers of NHPs such as Hawai'i, Washington, and Utah report hospitalization rates up to 10 times that of whites, and, in Los Angeles county, Pacific Islanders have the highest infection rate of any racial or ethnic group. With over 2 million Asian Americans employed as frontline and essential workers, they are also 2-3 times more likely to be diagnosed with COVID-19, and over 75 percent of APIA-owned businesses have little chance of receiving a Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan, dramatically slowing the community's economic recovery.¹

This violence has increased fear and mental health concerns in AAPI communities, compounding decades of neglect and refusal to acknowledge AAPI experiences with racism. More than 30 percent of Asian American adults say they have experienced interpersonal racism since the pandemic began, and one in four youth members of the community have also reported experiences with racism. Nationally, organizations have documented nearly 4000 hate incidents across 50 states and the District of Columbia.² And as schools begin to reopen, Asian American families are choosing to keep their children

¹ https://apiascholars.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/APIA_Scholars_AnnualReport_2020.pdf

² <https://secureservercdn.net/104.238.69.231/a1w.90d.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/210312-Stop-AAPI-Hate-National-Report-.pdf>

home at disproportionately high rates, fearing the same discrimination will be levied against their families.³

APIA Scholars staff have indicated that mental health is one of the top issues affecting students' academic performance, most notably in the months since the pandemic. During recent organizational events, mental health was raised as a top concern of students. Since the launch of APIA Scholars' mentoring program, staff were alerted to 93 "insight flags" reported by mentors indicating mentees were struggling with mental health issues, with nearly 30 insight flags identified in a recent three-month period (July-September 2020). Insight flags reported: depression, discrimination, dropping out of college, family conflict, roommate conflict, and severe anxiety.

As students struggle to make sense of this violence, in addition the significant adjustments they were already facing due to shuttered campuses and abrupt transitions to online learning, support systems matter. The Asian American Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISI) program, one of eight federally designated Minority Serving Institution (MSI) programs, was established by Congress in 2007 as part of the College Cost Reduction and Access Act and was expanded in 2008 under the Higher Education Opportunity Act. AANAPISI campuses enroll 1 in of every 3 APIAs at four-year institutions and 1 in 2 APIAs at two-year institutions. These campuses also award nearly half of the associate's degrees and approximately one quarter of bachelors degrees attained by APIA students. AANAPISI grant funds are used to support leadership development, student retention and graduation, collection and analysis of APIA student data, faculty training, curriculum development, and mental health services that are culturally relevant and pay particular attention to the needs of this diverse community.

While the recent spike in anti-Asian violence during the pandemic is disturbing, it is certainly not new. Our communities have been incarcerated in concentration camps and had their livelihoods destroyed, we have lived through hateful rhetoric, assaults and blame in the aftermath of terrorist attacks on our nation's soil, and we have suffered racist imagery and themed parties on campuses that claim to celebrate diversity, equity and inclusion.

Despite this rise in discrimination and violence against our communities, we are buoyed by recent examples of solidarity shown to our communities. APIA Scholars recently joined with the Asian Pacific Islander American Chamber of Commerce & Entrepreneurship to condemn this rise in violence and racial bias during the pandemic, and we have seen important similar efforts from many of our private corporate funders who partner with us to support APIA students' college access and success.⁴ We strongly encourage more efforts in both the public and private sectors to demonstrate such solidarity and stand together with the APIA community to ensure our collective cultures and values are elevated, understood, and appreciated as American.

³ https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/asian-american-students-home-school-in-person-pandemic/2021/03/02/eb7056bc-7786-11eb-8115-9ad5e9c02117_story.html

⁴ https://apiascholars.org/about/press-releases/2021_19_02/?fbclid=IwAR0bDMgZ-DiAjzjctxQdsff556nDkYUHppgq819a2APwsxn7OYynUamET9w