



**Written Statement Of
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**Before the United States House Of Representatives
Committee On The Judiciary
Subcommittee On The Constitution, Civil Rights, And Civil Liberties**

**Hearing On
“Discrimination And Violence Against Asian Americans”
March 18, 2021**

Dear Chairman Cohen, Ranking Member Johnson, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Council of Korean Americans (CKA) and the Korean American community, thank you for the opportunity to submit this written statement to the Subcommittee and to share the concerns and experiences of the Korean American community.

CKA is the leading independent, nonpartisan, national leadership organization for Korean Americans. Our mission is to advance the national voice, interest, and influence of the Korean American community through education, collaboration, and leadership development. We are dedicated to connecting, inspiring, and equipping multi-generational leaders for greater influence and impact. Our membership includes over 250 leaders across a wide spectrum of American life who share our commitment to collaboration, representation, generosity, and boldness.

We are deeply concerned about the increase in harassment, assaults, and acts of hate targeting members of the Asian American community. Unfortunately, these incidents have been on the rise since the nation began to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic in March of 2020, and they have not abated.

We strongly condemn these acts of discrimination and violence, regardless of their motivation. We are deeply concerned over the apparent targeting of Asian American elders and women.

These acts of discrimination, hate, and violence are harmful on many levels. They create a sense of fear within the victims and communities. They lead to a questioning of identity and self. They send the message that Asian Americans do not belong in their neighborhoods or the United States because they are somehow different. That Asian Americans are “perpetual



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foreigners.” We are not. We are neighbors and colleagues and friends. We strive to have livelihoods and to raise families, to work and laugh and cry in the face of life’s challenges as *Americans*. We can no longer be treated as foreigners in our own homes. As a country, we must acknowledge the prejudices that have culminated in these racially motivated violent acts and reject them once and for all.

Today, we are presented with an opportunity to create a more tolerant and inclusive country by committing ourselves to anti-racist principles and creating a community free from the threat of violence.

We call on federal, state, and local governments to work in partnership with impacted communities to provide support. We encourage the nation to reject the politics of fear and recognize that together we must be part of a movement that rejects xenophobia, racism, and dehumanization. Together, we can empower our communities to respond to acts of hate and violence, whether they are physical or verbal, targeted at ourselves or others.

Background on Acts of Anti-Asian Discrimination and Violence

Since March 2020, community advocates have documented over 3,700 acts of bias, hate, or violence against members of the Asian American community, primarily targeting those perceived to be of Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Filipino descent.¹ The number of documented anti-Asian hate crimes increased by 150% in major cities last year, while the overall number of hate crimes declined.² The rate of attacks against the Asian American community has remained relatively consistent throughout the pandemic, raising concerns that many are motivated by bias and prejudice against Asians.

Many high-profile incidents have targeted older members of the Asian American community. For example, an 84-year-old Thai grandfather, Vicha Ratanapakdee, was fatally attacked while on his morning walk in San Francisco, California.³ And a 91-year-old Chinese man was attacked in Oakland, California.⁴

¹ Russell Jeung Ph.D., Aggie Yellow Horse, Ph.D., Tara Popovic, and Richard Lim, *Stop AAPI Hate National Report 3/19/20 – 2/28/21*, Stop AAPI Hate (March 2020), <https://secureservercdn.net/104.238.69.231/a1w.90d.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/210312-Stop-AAPI-Hate-National-Report-.pdf> [*hereinafter* “Stop AAPI Hate Report”].

² Center for the Study of Extremism, California State University - San Bernardino, *FACT SHEET: Anti-Asian Prejudice March 2020*, <https://www.csusb.edu/sites/default/files/FACT%20SHEET-%20Anti-Asian%20Hate%202020%203.2.21.pdf>.

³ Don Lim, *84-year-old killed after horrific daytime attack caught on video in San Francisco*, KGO (February 1, 2021), <https://abc7news.com/san-francisco-senior-attacked-sf-man-pushed-on-video-day-time-attack-caught-anz-a-vista-crime/10205928/>.

⁴ Don Lim, *Shocking video shows 91-year-old man senselessly pushed to ground in Oakland's Chinatown*, KGO (February 4, 2021), <https://abc7news.com/man-pushed-to-ground-in-oakland-violence-chinatown-robberies/10311111/>.

Families have not been immune from violence. A family, including their 2 and 6 year-old children, were stabbed while in a store in Midland, Texas, for allegedly spreading COVID-19.⁵ Young people, including children and teenagers, report the highest share of incidents.⁶ One in four Asian students is the victim of COVID-19 related bullying.⁷

Disturbingly, women are more than two times as likely to be the targets of harassment than men.⁸ For example, an assailant was charged with a hate crime after assaulting a 26-year-old Filipino woman at the subway station.⁹ This Tuesday, eight people, including six Asian women, four of whom were Korean, were killed in a shooting spree around Atlanta, Georgia.¹⁰ We must acknowledge the role of misogyny in some of these attacks.

These acts of discrimination, harassment, and violence create a cloud of fear that casts its shadow across the Asian American community. We fear for our own safety and the safety of our grandparents, our brothers and sisters, unsure who will be singled out for a despicable attack next. We worry about the long-term impact of bullying on our children.

We cannot know if every incident is motivated by an explicit bias against Asians and qualifies as a hate crime. But in the current environment, where xenophobia runs rampant, all attacks and assaults are immediately suspect in the eyes of the victim and their community. That is the pernicious reality of acts of hate and discrimination; they terrorize the individual and their community. They can make one question their sense of belonging and identity.

This history of discrimination and treatment as the “other” is not new to the Asian American community. From fears about Asians spreading disease in early 1900s California¹¹, the gendered and sexualized stereotypes about Asian women, and the insidious othering of Asians as the “perpetual foreigner,” these incidents do not occur in a vacuum. They come loaded with

⁵ JuYeon Kim, *Report: Sam's Club stabbing suspect thought family was 'Chinese infecting people with coronavirus'*, KXAN (April 8, 2020), <https://www.kxan.com/news/crime/report-sams-club-stabbing-suspect-thought-family-was-chinese-infecting-people-with-coronavirus/>.

⁶ Stop AAPI Hate Report.

⁷ Claire Wang, *'You have Chinese virus!': 1 in 4 Asian American youths experience racist bullying, report says*, NBC News (Sept. 17, 2020), <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/25-percent-asian-american-youths-racist-bullying-n1240380>.

⁸ Kimmy Yan, *There were 3,800 anti-Asian racist incidents, mostly against women, in past year*, NBC News (March 16, 2020), <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/there-were-3-800-anti-asian-racist-incidents-mostly-against-n1261257>.

⁹ Brian Ke, *Man Charged With Hate Crime for Assaulting Filipino American Woman on Caltrain in San Jose*, NextShark (March 16, 2021), <https://www.yahoo.com/entertainment/man-charged-hate-crime-assaulting-172355090.html>.

¹⁰ *Updated Coverage of the March 16, 2021 Shooting*, Atlanta Journal Constitution, <https://www.ajc.com/news/breaking-multiple-shootings-shut-down-busy-woodstock-highway/OLE23RVIO5BE3ELWBZAA6GVSSA/> (last accessed March 17, 2021).

¹¹ Alan M. Kraut, Ph.D, *Immigration, Ethnicity, and the Pandemic*, Public Health Rep. 2010; 125(Suppl 3): 123–133, doi: 10.1177/00333549101250S315, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2862341/>.

the history of disparate treatment and invisibility, acceptability, or complicity in the eyes of the government, press, and public. And they have harmful effects on our communities.

Impact on the Korean American Community

According to Stop AAPI Hate, approximately 15% of victims of anti-Asian acts over the past year were Korean, making them the second most likely group to be victimized after Chinese Americans.¹²

Incidents have occurred in different forms around the country. A 27 year-old Korean American man was assaulted and had racist slurs hurled at him in the heart of Los Angeles's Koreatown.¹³ An 83 year-old Korean American woman was punched and spit on in White Plains, New York.¹⁴ A 25 year-old Korean American woman and a 31 year-old Korean American man reported being told to go back to China while in New York.¹⁵

While not all of these incidents fit the legal definition of a hate crime, they are just as impactful and reverberate with our lived experiences to our communities.

The data on current incidents are in line with the all too common experiences of Korean Americans. As we describe in our report, *The National Korean American Community: Promises, Perils, and Paradoxes*, thirty percent (30%) of Korean Americans have experienced a major discrimination event.¹⁶ Further, almost all respondents, eighty-eight percent (88%), face microaggressions because of their perceived ethnicity on a monthly basis.¹⁷

The Korean American community, along with other Asian American and minority communities, has faced the ugly realities of racism and discrimination for too long. We must change this.

Recommendations

We must acknowledge the scope and nature of the problem, including the intersection with structural racism and gendered violence, by openly condemning acts of hate, bias, and violence

¹² Stop AAPI Hate Report.

¹³ Sarah Moon and Claire Colbert, *Attack on Asian American man in LA's Koreatown being investigated as a hate crime*, CNN (Feb. 26, 2021), <https://www.cnn.com/2021/02/26/us/asian-american-man-attack-koreatown-los-angeles-trnd/index.html>.

¹⁴ Derek Hawkins, *An 83-year-old Asian American woman was spat on and punched so hard she blacked out, police say*, The Washington Post (March 13, 2021), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2021/03/13/asian-american-attack-white-plains/>.

¹⁵ *Asian Americans told to 'go back to China' in racist rant in New York City*, WABC (March 15, 2021), <https://abc7ny.com/asian-hate-crime-maria-ha-dan-anti-asian/10419611/>.

¹⁶ Taeku Lee, Ph.D., *The National Korean American Community: Promises, Perils, and Paradoxes*, Council of Korean Americans (December 2020), <https://councilka.org/2020-cka-national-report/> [hereinafter, "CKA Report"].

¹⁷ CKA Report.

and providing support to victims, communities, with a focus on prevention. The current incidents are part of a recurring cycle of xenophobia. The lack of a forceful and strong response by the government and the public writ-large against all forms of anti-Asian violence and discrimination perpetuates the idea that the harassment of some communities is acceptable, that they are acceptable victims and targets of crimes, even if not directly motivated by bias.

First, we must address the concerns about physical safety. CKA is conducting civic leader training on physical security for civic organizations within the Korean American community to address their physical infrastructure. Community groups are organizing volunteer neighborhood patrols to help residents feel safe. Local and federal law enforcement should work in partnership using a community-oriented policing approach to provide a sense of security. Further, the Department of Homeland Security should increase its outreach to Asian American and Pacific Islander communities about the Nonprofit Security Grants program, so the funds may be used to protect community-based organizations, such as houses of worship.¹⁸

Second, stronger efforts must be made to educate law enforcement, teachers, and other public officials about acts of bias and bias-motivated crimes and conduct educational outreach to Asian American and Pacific Islander communities.

Unfortunately, most incidents do not get labeled as hate crimes under the stringent evidentiary requirements. Any education and outreach programs must be comprehensive and address the continuum of acts of bias. CKA is working with community organizations and our members to educate the Korean American community about hate crimes laws and reporting and responding to all incidents of bias. We strongly encourage other organizations and agencies to do the same.

Governments must be equipped to respond and provide support to victims to break the cycle of bias. Law enforcement officers and other leaders, including teachers, should be trained on recognizing and intervening in acts of bias and receive de-escalation training. Further, law enforcement and district attorneys should be transparent about their decisions to classify acts as hate crimes as a legal matter while acknowledging the trauma-impacted community of non-criminal acts of hate and bias or when the community feels that they are being targeted.

Third, we stress the importance of culturally and linguistically competent outreach. Information and victim services must be accessible to all persons regardless of their fluency in English. Approximately fifty-six percent (56%) of Korean Americans are limited English proficient (less than fluent).¹⁹ It is estimated that three-quarters of Koreans speak a language other than English in their home. And these numbers are even higher for the elderly members of our community.

¹⁸ Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), *Nonprofit Security Grant Program*, <https://www.fema.gov/grants/preparedness/nonprofit-security>.

¹⁹ Sono Shah and Karthick Ramakrishnan, *Why Disaggregate? Big Differences in Language Access*, AAPI Data (April 19, 2017), <http://aapidata.com/blog/countmein-language-access/>

Fourth, the government must engage in comprehensive data collection about all acts of hate and bias, not just limited to hate crimes alone.

Conclusion

The pain that our communities are feeling at this moment is real. As we navigate a world transformed by the pandemic, we deal with attacks on our families and friends based on who they are, and we experience ongoing anxieties about our safety.

The wave of discrimination and violence we are experiencing today is not new for the Korean American or Asian American community. It is not new in our country's history either.

What is different and what gives us hope is that, as a country, we now recognize the long history of anti-Asian hate, discrimination, and exclusion. We are giving voice to the experiences and feelings of our community. We see people of all backgrounds coming together to condemn hate and violence in all forms.

Thank you, Chairman Cohen, Ranking Member Johnson, and Members of the Subcommittee, for being part of the solution by shining a light on the increase in acts of anti-Asian hate. We cannot stop there. The current situation is an opportunity for transformative change in our approach to eliminating acts of violence and discrimination that target all communities. CKA is committed to being part of the solution to anti-Asian violence. We urge you to wield your power and influence to implement effective solutions.