

CONGRESS

House Dems renew call for hate crime law after anti-Asian attacks

AAPI caucus pushes for law to better track hate crimes after rising violence against Asian Americans



Rep. Judy Chu, D-Calif., at a National Press Club event in 2018. (Sarah Silbiger/CQ Roll Call file photo)

By **Michael Macagnone**
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House Democrats renewed a push Friday for a federal hate crimes tracking law, amid an increase in assaults on members of Asian American and Pacific Islander communities since the start of the coronavirus pandemic.

Speaker [Nancy Pelosi](#), D-Calif., Rep. [Hakeem Jeffries](#), D-N.Y., and members of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, Congressional Hispanic Caucus and Congressional Black Caucus called on the Biden administration to do more in combating a surge in hate crimes.

“We need each of us to do what we can to stop these hate crimes. All of us must be vocal in rejecting xenophobia and racism,” said CAPAC chair Rep. [Judy Chu](#), D-Calif.

Chu said her caucus will push for a House Judiciary Committee hearing on new federal hate crime tracking legislation. The current tracking law from 1990 “doesn’t have any teeth,” she said.

A new law could set a federal standard for hate crime reporting as well as provide training for local departments on tracking hate crimes, she said. Chu pointed out that the current law allows for a mish-

mash of standards where one community may consider swastika graffiti a hate crime and another, just defacement.

Federal hate crime statistics for 2020 have not yet been released, but reports from the Asian American Bar Association of New York and the group Stop AAPI Hate tracked an increase in hate crime attacks since the start of the pandemic. The bar association found more than 250 incidents of discrimination against Asian Americans in New York in 2020, ranging from verbal harassment to physical assault.

Stop AAPI Hate received reports of more than 2,500 incidents of discrimination or attacks against Asian Americans, according to a report it released in December.

Pelosi tied the attacks to the white supremacy movement in the country, calling it the “largest bucket of concerns” around domestic terrorism. She also pointed to President Joe Biden’s Jan. 26 memorandum recognizing the rise in violence against AAPI communities was tied to the pandemic.

Biden’s order also directed the Department of Health and Human Services to address the inequitable impact of the virus on AAPI communities, as well as for the Justice Department to step up hate crime enforcement efforts.

Jeffries said “the Asian American community right now is facing a crisis of hatred that we cannot tolerate,” but didn’t make any specific commitments on the broader Democratic caucus’ next steps.

repeatedly called “the Chinese virus” or described using a racist slur, as spurring some of the violence.

“The former president showed that words can kill and his already have,” Lieu said, referring to Trump’s role in the Jan. 6 deadly attack on the Capitol.

Chu said CAPAC plans to call on the FBI for more followup on that effort once an attorney general is confirmed . She pointed to 14 Republicans who voted to support a resolution from Rep. [Grace Meng](#), D-N.Y., last Congress condemning violence against AAPI communities, and said she hoped that bipartisan support would carry over to a new hate crime law.

Trump’s history on the subject could be a sore spot in finding Republican support for the measure. Rep. [Bill Posey](#), R-Fla., withdrew his support from the Meng resolution last year, saying on the House floor he felt it was no longer a “good faith effort to protect Asian Americans.”

“I am more than saddened to see that this resolution and today’s debate is being used for nothing more than to malign and vilify the president of the United States,” Posey said at the time.



Replay

Chu and the others said they support a proposal from Rep. [Donald S. Beyer Jr.](#), D-Va., and Sen. [Richard Blumenthal](#), D-Conn. The legislation has yet to be reintroduced this Congress; in the last session, language from the bill was rolled into a House-passed coronavirus relief bill that received no action in the Senate.

Blumenthal released a press release in December saying he discussed the legislation with Biden's transition team. A number of House Democrats called for leadership to pass the measure in response to last month's attack on the Capitol by Trump supporters.

The language of the bill introduced last Congress would create locally focused grant programs for hate crime tracking as well as the creation of state hate crime hotlines. Local jurisdictions would have to follow federal hate crime definitions in reporting incidents or be forced to pay back the funds.

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