



March 19, 2021

Chairman Steve Cohen  
2138 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Ranking Member Mike Johnson  
2138 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

To Chairman Cohen, Ranking Member Johnson, and Members of the Subcommittee:

The Laotian American National Alliance is pleased to submit this written statement to the Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties of the U.S. House Committee on the Judiciary for the March 18, 2021 hearing titled “Discrimination and Violence Against Asian Americans.”

For more than 20 years, the Laotian American National Alliance has been dedicated to advancing the social and economic well-being of the multi-ethnic Laotian Americans in the United States through civic engagement and public policy advocacy.

We thank the subcommittee for conducting this hearing to understand the alarming rise in discrimination, harrassment, 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.

### **COVID-19 Motivated Anti-Asian Hate**

Asian Americans have been facing a dual pandemic of the coronavirus and of 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. We have experienced tremendous grief, mourning both lives lost to the virus and to white supremacist violence.

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.

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 this week, six Asian women working at massage parlors in Atlanta, Georgia were killed by a suspected white supremacist. It is painfully clear to us that racist scaremongering and scapegoating is deadly, and it is harming the most vulnerable members of our Asian American communities—elders, women, immigrants, and working class people.

Over 3,800 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 from March 2020 to February 2021 . Of these almost 4,000 reported incidents, nearly 70% of victims were women. 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. All these attacks, hate crimes or not, constitute an abhorrent pattern of violence that must end.

It is crucial to note that violence and discrimination against Asian Americans have been startlingly 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.

## **Ongoing Structural and Historical Racism Against Asian Americans**

These attacks on Asian Americans are unjust and unacceptable, and they are not new. Our communities have experienced violence and racism—interpersonal, institutional, and structural—since the beginning of our stories in this nation.

Violence is not new to the Laotian American community. The pathway to becoming a Laotian American started with America's Secret War in Laos, which resulted in Laos being the most heavily bombed country per capita in the history of the world. Many of us were forced to flee for our lives and were welcomed to the U.S. by failing refugee resettlement programs, which

marshalled many of us into low wage jobs with no health insurance, sick leave, or other benefits. The next generation of Laotian Americans entered into failing public school systems, causing us to be sucked into the pipeline of the criminal punishment system and spit out into detention and deportation.

## **Issues for the Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties to Consider**

Our communities are hurting more than ever before. Along with the rise of xenophobia and hate crimes in the age of COVID-19, Laotian Americans are seeing mass unemployment and loss of health coverage; small businesses that are in freefall and closing; families unable to pay the rent; families facing detention and deportation, many without representation. With a combined poverty and low-income rate of 41% (SEARAC, 2020) and a per capita income of \$17,951 (SEARAC, 2020), many members of our communities are working on the front lines, risking their lives for the rest of us—not only without reward, but without basic dignities like paid sick leave and access to health insurance.

## **Recommendations**

We ask that any action you take must center Asian American women and elders with an emphasis on responding to these attacks through a coordinated interagency effort that systematically addresses the multiple and intersecting barriers and hardships the AAPI community faces, especially in the light of economic devastation as a result of COVID-19.

The federal government's response must be holistic and an interagency effort. We are not asking for more law enforcement – time and time again, more law enforcement did not lead to protection and safety. It instead led to more violence aimed at and control of Black and Brown communities, including our own community members.

We ask for an interagency response that is based in the needs of the communities on the ground, based on tackling the systemic racism and white supremacy that continues to plague our nation, and addressing the needs of the survivors, such as increased culturally informed victim support that is language accessible, community support, meaningful physical and mental health access including for all immigrants, and economic assistance that focuses on those who need it most.

Lastly, we ask for disaggregated data of our AAPI community. For too long, our issues have been erased in favor of averages that do not accurately reflect our realities.<sup>9</sup> The AAPI community is a vast and incredibly diverse group encompassing numerous ethnicities. There are critical differences and lived experiences that these ethnicities face. Yet lumping us all together not only fails to acknowledge that, it also erases many of our distinct issues that must be addressed.

## **Conclusion**

The Laotian American National Alliance thanks 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,

The Laotian American National Alliance