



Written Statement For the Hearing Entitled, “Discrimination and Violence Against Asian Americans” on March 18, 2021 at 10:00 AM
Testimony from National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health Association

Dear Chairman Cohen, Ranking Member Johnson, and Members of the Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties of the House Committee on the Judiciary,

NAAPIMHA 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.”

NAAPIMHA is a 501c3 nonprofit organization that works closely with community based behavioral health organizations providing services to the Asian American/Pacific Islander communities. Our mission is to improve the health and wellbeing of AAPIs, recognizing the impact mental health has on their overall health. Racism is a mental health issue that has profound impact on the emotional wellbeing of AAPIs. Our primary focus has been to help communities address mental health from a public health approach which looks at all the factors that influence health disparities. Access to care is frequently identified as one of the key factors to reducing health disparities but for many of our communities there is little for them to access. There are far too few providers who have the language and cultural competency to work effectively with AAPIs. Our communities also cannot wait until they receive their PhDs, MDs or MSWs. Community members are an untapped resource and should be included in the broader definition of workforce in terms of training, support and being able to get reimbursement for services.

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

The recent shootings in Atlanta are a painful reminder of increasing anti-Asian sentiment as documented in the 3/16/2021 National Report from Stop AAPI Hate (<https://stopaapihate.org>). Our hearts go out to all the victims, families and loved ones of not only these shootings but all the other hate crimes the community has experienced. While the authorities are saying “it’s too early to confirm this is a hate crime,” it is impossible to ignore who the victims are and the impact this is having on Asian Americans around the country: 6 of the 8 killed were Asian women. Anti-Asian sentiment has been fueled by the intolerant, hateful and divisive language including the use of such terms as “kung flu” and “China virus,” which clearly added to the racial tension.

The psychological trauma around hate crimes is particularly important because of the insidiousness nature of these acts and what it represent to the victim and the community. It isn’t about “being in the wrong place at the wrong time”. It is about being **perceived** as being the **wrong type of person all the time**. The attacks on a mosque in Minnesota, or a Buddhist Temple in LA, the senseless attacks on an elderly man in San Francisco’s Chinatown and the painful shootings on March 16 raise the alarm for our communities around the country. As we begin to slowly move out of quarantine, people are worrying how safe it will be to venture out into the public. The fact that most of the victims in the Atlanta shooting were Asian women raises the question of looking more deeply into acts of violence against both women and Asians.

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.

- Historical
 - 19th century Yellow Peril
 - Chinese Exclusion Act → Immigration quotas
 - Japanese Internment Camps
 - Murder of Vincent Chin
- Housing and economic justice
 - Gentrification and displacement of low-income immigrant Asian Americans
 - Predatory lending/discriminatory lending practices
 - Disaggregated poverty rates
 - Asian American (essential) workers, labor issues; small businesses, unemployment rates
- Immigration
 - Muslim Ban (can be tied back to Chinese Exclusion Act setting a precedent)
 - Deportations of Southeast Asian refugees, ICE and undocumented Asian immigrants
- Education
 - Disaggregated educational attainment rates, school-to-prison pipeline
 - Culturally responsive education, ethnic studies
- Civil Rights
 - Police brutality against Asian Americans like Angelo Quinto, Christian Hall, Tommy Le (can be tied back to Vincent Chin, flaws in criminal justice system)
- Health
 - Health disparities before/during pandemic
 - Mental health impacts of COVID racism

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

[Racial trauma](#) is real and can be emotionally paralyzing. It can result in fear, depression, anxiety, hopelessness, humiliation, sleeplessness, and high levels of stress. One of the hidden consequences of racial trauma is the handing down from generation to generation. Mental health providers are well aware of secondary trauma that is experienced by succeeding generations of those who directly experienced the Killing Fields, were forced into the concentration camps of Executive Order 9066, those who experienced mass shootings and racially motivated attacks. Hate crimes are difficult to combat because of the shame it brings to the person. Shame is

debilitating because it makes a person feel unsafe to be who they are, to identify with a particular group be it racial, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, religious or other identification.

Recommendations

- AAPIs should have more opportunities to tell their story in Congress
- Call for tangible actions, especially after [Presidential Memorandum Condemning and Combating Racism Xenophobia and Intolerance against AAPIs](#)
- Federal agency enforcement of anti-discrimination policies
- Don't wait for another national emergency to have conversation about violence against Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, and other communities of color; many advocates and community members have been speaking out and need to be heard
- Note for organizations that broadly serve Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders: Discussion about COVID-19 related attacks on Asian Americans sometimes use the term "AAPI" and conflate Pacific Islanders' experiences during the pandemic with that of Asian Americans. Highly encouraged to be intentional about if/when/how to use "AAPI" throughout the testimony.
- Support the expansion of the Excellence in Mental Health Act introduced by Congresswoman Doris Matsui. It is critical to support **ethnic specific AAPI** serving behavioral health organizations. These agencies must fight with larger organizations that are ill equipped to address the needs of AAPIs in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner resulting in poorer quality of care and adding to the current health disparities.

Conclusion

NAAPIMHA 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,
National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health Association