

**Written Statement for the Hearing on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties Subcommittee Entitled, “Discrimination and Violence Against Asian Americans” on March 18, 2021 at 10:00 AM
Testimony from OCA -- Asian Pacific American Advocates**

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,

OCA – Asian Pacific American Advocates 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.”

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

Organizational Information

Founded in 1973, OCA – Asian Pacific American Advocates is a national non-profit, membership-driven civil rights organization based in Washington, D.C. with over 35 chapters and affiliates around the country. OCA is dedicated to advancing the social, political, and economic well-being of Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs). Touching hundreds of thousands of AAPIs each year, OCA works with its organizational partners, members, chapters, and supporters to empower the next generation of leaders.

OCA’s Work to Address the Rise in Anti-Asian Violence

Reporting and Data Collection

Reporting hate crimes and collecting data are necessary for effective prevention and response. OCA, along with partner organizations, have utilized reporting sites to monitor hate crimes across the country, with over 4,000 incidents reported since the start of the pandemic in March 2020. The recent spate of violence against Asian Americans highlights the need for better tracking and reporting. As a result, OCA is working with data scientists to revamp our reporting system and forms, develop data visualizations that can be published online and in monthly reports, and data analysis so as to gather a comprehensive picture of the trends and patterns around anti-Asian hate incidents in the U.S.

Responding to Hate Crimes: A Community Action Guide

OCA is currently updating the Second Edition of our guide, *Responding to Hate Crimes: A Community Action Guide*. This manual offers OCA members and the general public step-by-step

guidelines, checklists, internet resources, and best community response practices to hate crimes. We use this guide to complement education workshops sponsored by OCA's local chapters and the guide serves as an activist tool to all communities.

Situational Awareness Workshops

In response to the increased rise of anti-Asian hate and xenophobia towards marginalized communities of color, OCA developed a bystander intervention training that provides leaders the educational and awareness tools to combat these types of systemic oppression. This workshop trains people to be confident and effective bystanders against racism and discrimination by equipping leaders with the tools to intervene whenever they see or experience harassment. During this 1-hour interactive training, participants learn about and identify their own power, privilege, bias, and race in order to become effective bystanders. In the process, participants learn intervention strategies such as our RESPECT technique and meet and network with other participants from diverse backgrounds and organizations. OCA leaders then train chapters across the country to make an impact through leading this situational awareness workshop in their local communities.

Supporting Local Chapters and Local Efforts

Hate crimes are a community issue and therefore require community efforts to effect change at the local level. As such, OCA National supports our local chapters across the country in their direct, grassroots work to mobilize people and resources within their communities to create and implement a plan of action. We believe the community is best suited to design its own response, given that each community has its own character, people, resources, politics, and dynamics. In light of the spate of violence against Asian elders in the Bay Area, California, our local chapters coordinated volunteers to escort Asian elders to protect them against assaults, organized candlelit vigils and mobilized support and resources for the victims' families, put together educational workshops to educate on the history of discrimination against Asian Americans, and engaged in cross-racial dialogue to promote healing and understanding across all communities of color. In the coming months, OCA National will host a webinar where chapter leaders will discuss the grassroots work they are doing locally so chapters across the country can replicate best practices in their home communities.

Anti-Asian Hate Social Media Campaign

On March 3, 2021, OCA and partner organizations collaborated to launch an Anti-Asian Hate Social Media Campaign. This campaign included a toolkit with social media assets that promote commitments that people can make for community safety, facts on hate incidents and crimes, and ways to organize locally. The kit also provided additional local, state, and national resources that included a list of organizations and mutual aid funds that are doing work in local communities, training opportunities and workshops, and information on the importance of passing the NO HATE Act.

OCA Local Chapters and Anti-Asian Racism Incidents

Earlier this year, 84-year-old Vicha Ratanapakdee was murdered in San Francisco after being pushed to the ground.¹ Less than one week later, a 91-year-old man was shoved to the ground in Oakland, CA Chinatown.² It was alleged that the perpetrator was also linked to two other violent incidents. The week prior, a 64-year-old grandmother was assaulted in San Jose.³ The following day, Noel Quintana, a 61-year-old man was slashed across the face on a subway in New York City where it was reported that no one came to his aid following the attack.⁴ These are just the few cases that were reported solely by local media sources and have eventually gained national attention. Fear and distrust in law enforcement, due to their lack of response, cause victims of hate incidents to stay quiet, resulting in major underreporting of anti-Asian hate. In addition to these cases, recently, on March 16, 2021, six Asian women were murdered in Atlanta.⁵

Over 4,000 hate crimes and incidents against Asian Americans were reported to OCA, Stand Against Hatred (Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC), and Stop AAPI Hate from March 2020 to February 2021.⁶ Of these almost 4,000 reported incidents, nearly 70% of victims were women.⁷ 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.

Violence against Asian Americans is not new— Asian Americans have experienced structural and systemic violence, racism, xenophobia, and discrimination for decades, well before COVID-19. However, since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a steep rise in attacks against Asian Americans and they have not abated since. 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.

¹ Kyung Lah and Jason Kravarik, “Family of Thai Immigrant, 84, Says Fatal Attack ‘Was Driven by Hate,’” CNN, February 16, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/02/16/us/san-francisco-vicha-ratanapakdee-asian-american-attacks/index.html>.

² Lauren Hernández, “Surveillance Video Captures Assault on 91-Year-Old Man in Oakland’s Chinatown,” San Francisco Chronicle, February 5, 2021, <https://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/Surveillance-video-captures-assault-on-15926452.php>.

³ Azenith Smith, “Asian Community Feels Targeted by Crime Ahead of Lunar New Year Celebrations,” Text.Article, KTVU FOX 2 (KTVU FOX 2, February 4, 2021), <https://www.ktvu.com/news/asian-community-feels-targeted-by-crime-ahead-of-lunar-new-year-celebrations>.

⁴ Marian Liu and Rachel Hatzipanagos, “‘Nobody Came, Nobody Helped’: Fears of Anti-Asian Violence Rattle the Community,” The Washington Post, February 25, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2021/02/25/asian-hate-crime-attack-patrol/?arc404=true>.

⁵ The New York Times, “8 Dead in Atlanta Spa Shootings, With Fears of Anti-Asian Bias,” accessed March 18, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/03/17/us/shooting-atlanta-acworth>.

⁶ Kimmy Yam, “There Were 3,800 Anti-Asian Racist Incidents, Mostly against Women, in Past Year,” NBC News, March 16, 2021, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/there-were-3-800-anti-asian-racist-incidents-mostly-against-n1261257>.

⁷ Ibid.

In addition to incidents of anti-Asian violence that have drawn media attention, at OCA, our membership and local chapters have reported incidents of anti-Asian violence that have occurred in their communities. The following paragraphs provide the descriptions of these hate incidents. All of these incidents make it clear that Asian Americans do not feel safe and that action must be taken to address anti-Asian violence immediately.

OCA - Greater Seattle

OCA-Greater Seattle (OCA-GS) has shared that on the OCA-GS board, many can share stories about children, students, colleagues, and friends who have been spat on, harassed, accused of absurd conspiracy theories, verbally and physically abused, all because of ignorance and hate. As reported by KING 5 News on March 15, 2021, with 542 cases between March 2020 - December 2020, Seattle is the fourth highest in the nation with hate crimes against AAPIs during this period; this translates to being the second highest per capita in the U.S. for anti-AAPI hate crimes.⁸ The Chinese Information Services Center in Seattle's Chinatown has received over 160 cases from mostly elderly clients which has reflected the rise of anti-Asian hate crimes throughout the pandemic. OCA-GS also reported that generally, during the pandemic, sales have plummeted and businesses have shuttered in Seattle's Chinatown/International District and other AAPI regions. In addition, there have also been several incidents of arson.

OCA-GS has also reported instances of racism and vandalism where white neighbors posted "Chinese Virus" on their windows and the International Full Gospel Fellowship Church was vandalized with racist graffiti for the fourth time in its parking lot. In big block letters, it stated, "CHINA, YOU WILL PAY." In a separate incident, an AAPI manager for Starbucks was taken aback because someone did not want him to make their drink.

There have also been instances of physical violence and aggression towards Asian Americans. Noriko Nasu was walking in Seattle's Chinatown on February 25, 2021 where she was struck in the face with a hard, solid object wrapped inside a sock, knocked unconscious and suffered a fractured nose and several chipped teeth.⁹ Another incident occurred on March 15, 2021 as an OCA-GS board member, Terry Yaplee, signed in for a haircut. As he was returning to his car to await his turn, an older white male glared at him then screamed, "Get the f###k out of here." Yaplee replied angrily, "You're not talking to me, etc." A staring match ensued between the two and while the white man eventually left, this incident could have easily degenerated into violence. While some may say that this is not a hate crime, it is a hate incident. Until yesterday, Yaplee had not experienced this type of encounter while visiting his barber. This episode is typical of the harassment many in OCA-GS have encountered since March 2020.

⁸ Glenn Farley, "Puget Sound Rallies Call for Stop to Anti-Asian Hate Crimes," KING 5 News, March 15, 2021, <https://www.king5.com/article/news/rallies-against-asian-hate-crimes-rise/281-338a2b2c-8733-4b07-b632-9288c70fc598>.

⁹ Suzanne Phan and Tammy Mutasa, "Victim of Attack in Chinatown-International District Says Assault Was Hate Crime," KOMO News, March 9, 2021, <https://komonews.com/news/local/victim-of-attack-in-chinatown-international-district-says-assault-was-hate-crime>.

OCA - New Jersey

An OCA - New Jersey leader reported an incident on October 10, 2020 where Max Ong, an Asian American man was initially verbally assaulted with derogatory racist language after he attempted to stop another man from urinating on the building in which Ong resided. Eventually the argument escalated and while Ong's brother attempted to protect him, Ong was physically assaulted by a group of men. During the altercation, one man in the group was seriously injured and afterwards, Ong was arrested that night and his brother surrendered at a later date.

OCA - Greater Chicago

OCA - Greater Chicago reported that most reported anti-Asian hate cases have been in the form of verbal harassment or pranks. One case that was prosecuted from last year took place on March 21, 2020, when a 60-year-old Chinese American man was attacked by two women while jogging in west suburban Naperville.¹⁰ The man's daughter, who asked not to be named fearing additional attacks, said her father was running along a trail when one of the women threw a log at him, accused him of being sick, told him to "go back to China," and spat at him.¹¹

Recommendations

- OCA seeks a high level, coordinated response from the Biden Administration that focuses on the following: Ensuring that law enforcement is properly trained and incidents are properly reported; working closely with local communities and organizations and following their lead in local efforts to address the increasing violence; sending a clear, unequivocal message that the government's priority is to protect the AAPI community.
- Amplify education on this issue and create space for cross-racial healing, dialogue, and solidarity amongst all vulnerable, marginalized communities of color.
- Do not wait for another national emergency to have conversations 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.

Conclusion

OCA – Asian Pacific American Advocates thanks the Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties for bringing attention to the 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, OCA hopes you will continue to use the power of this

¹⁰ Sun-Times Wire, "Police Seek Suspects in Naperville Jogger Attack," Chicago Sun-Times, March 27, 2020, <https://chicago.suntimes.com/crime/2020/3/27/21196670/naperville-jogger-attack-police-seek-suspects-photos-crime-stoppers-75th-washington>.

¹¹ Madhu Krishnamurthy, "Naperville Trail Attack on Chinese-American Man Leaves Many Uneasy," Daily Herald, April 18, 2020, <https://www.dailyherald.com/news/20200418/naperville-trail-attack-on-chinese-american-man-leaves-many-uneasy->.



OCA - Asian Pacific American Advocates

ADVOCATE EMBRACING THE HOPES AND ASPIRATIONS OF ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICANS

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.