

Testimony of Congresswoman Judy Chu (CA-27)
Chair of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus

**Before the House Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights,
and Civil Liberties**

**Hearing on “Discrimination and the Civil Rights of the Muslim, Arab, and
South Asian American Communities”**

March 1, 2022

Thank you Chairman Nadler, Ranking Member Jordan, Subcommittee Chairman Cohen, Ranking Member Johnson, and other distinguished members of the Committee for the opportunity to join my esteemed colleagues in providing testimony on an incredibly important issue: discrimination and civil rights of Muslim, Arab, and South Asian communities in the United States. I especially want to thank my fellow members on this panel for voicing their personal experiences and uplifting the voices of their communities to the Committee today. As Chair of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, or CAPAC, I have spent many years advocating for and defending the civil rights of the entirety of the Asian American and Pacific Islander, or AAPI, community, which includes many of the groups named in this hearing.

As we begin today’s hearing, we must understand that anti-Asian hate and discrimination, which has been recently thrust into the spotlight, is not a new phenomenon. Whether it’s the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, Japanese American incarceration during World War II, or the surveillance of Muslim, Arab, and South Asian communities after 9/11, our history has shown us what happens when Asian Americans are used as scapegoats in times of crisis.

In our more recent history, in the wake of the attacks on our nation on 9/11, the Muslim, Middle Eastern, Arab, Sikh, and South Asian communities became subject to an increasing atmosphere of suspicion, xenophobia, and violence. In fact, just four days after 9/11, Balbir Singh Sodhi – a Sikh father, husband, and brother – was shot while planting flowers outside his Arizona gas station, becoming the first victim of a post-9/11 hate crime. Sadly, he would not be the last.

Since then, the focus on terrorism from abroad also became a political justification for more prejudice at home. From the passage of the Patriot Act to lies about terrorists at the Southern border, prejudice has been used to justify cruel immigration policies, Muslim travel bans, and more in just the past few years alone. What’s even worse is that this rhetoric has actually inspired new domestic terrorist threats, and innocent lives have been lost as a result.

This prejudice took a concrete form in the initial days of the Trump Administration when Donald Trump announced the first Muslim Ban. What followed were years of pain for families deliberately separated by this ban, forced to miss weddings, funerals, births, graduations, and more. While President Biden rescinded this ban on his first day in office, we must ensure that no President has the power to create a ban like this, based solely on religion and xenophobia, ever again. I am proud that the House passed my bill along with Representatives Lofgren, Carson,

Omar, Tlaib, and Beyer, the NO BAN Act, which repeals all iterations of the Muslim Ban and ensures that no future president can unilaterally ban an entire group based on their religion.

The Muslim Ban wasn't just cruel for its personal impacts on families, it was also dangerous in the way it promoted fear of Muslims, which we know leads to more violence. As we have seen with the increase in anti-Asian hate over the past two years, with over 10,000 incidents since March of 2020, creating fear and fostering prejudice against one group can lead to the harassment, suffering, and even death of innocents. That is why I am so proud that the bipartisan Jabara-Heyer NO HATE Act, which I led with Representative Don Beyer and others, was included in the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act that was signed into law last May. This law provides local law enforcement with the resources and training to improve hate crimes tracking and reporting, something we know is necessary in addressing the sharp rise in hate crimes against all minority communities.

Nobody, whether you're Asian, South Asian, Arab, Muslim, Sikh, or any other community, should be targeted simply because of their ethnicity or religion. To recognize the 20th anniversary of 9/11 last year, I joined with Representatives Pramila Jayapal, Ilhan Omar, and Rashida Tlaib to introduce a resolution acknowledging the government's role in unjustly targeting people following the September 11th attacks and how it contributed to spreading hate, racism, xenophobia, and discrimination. The resolution also calls for congressional hearings like this one to explore this impact and allocates resources to help victims in the Arab, Muslim, Middle Eastern, South Asian, and Sikh communities, so I thank this Committee for taking this important step today.

As Chair of CAPAC, I look forward to working with my colleagues on this panel, many of the experts you will hear from on the next panel, and all of you on this Committee to continue the work of combatting discrimination against all our communities.