

February 11, 2021

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National Advocates for Asian
American, Native Hawaiian &
Pacific Islander Health

The Honorable Frank Pallone Jr.
Chairman
House Committee on Energy & Commerce
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Pallone:

The Asian & Pacific Islander Health Forum (APIAHF) supports the inclusion of targeted funding for medically underserved communities and the Indian Health Service in the Energy & Commerce's Budget Reconciliation Legislative Recommendations Relating to Public Health. We also urge the inclusion of direct funding for community-based organizations to carry out testing, tracing, vaccination, and linguistically and culturally accessible public outreach services in the final COVID relief package. APIAHF also recently submitted written testimony to the House Committee on Energy & Commerce, Subcommittee on Health on February 3, 2021, outlining the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on communities of color.¹

APIAHF is the nation's leading health policy organization working to advance the health and well-being of over 20 million Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (AA and NHPI) across the U.S. and territories. APIAHF works to improve access to and the quality of care for communities who are predominantly immigrant, many of whom are limited English proficient, and may be new to the U.S. healthcare system or unfamiliar with private or public coverage. We have longstanding relationships with over 150 community-based organizations across 34 states and the Pacific, to whom we provide capacity building, advocacy and technical assistance.

Nearly one year into the COVID-19 pandemic, the national emergency has magnified longstanding inequities that continue to undermine the health and well-being of racial and ethnic minorities overall, including AA and NHPI. According to the UCLA COVID-19 Racial Data Tracker, NHPIs are the most likely to have contracted COVID-19 in 2020.² In at least 10 states, AAs have a case fatality rate that is disproportionately higher than the general population, while the same is true for NHPIs in 8 states.³ Recent estimates indicate a high burden of COVID-19 deaths among AAs, with almost 14,000 excess deaths, and AAs have the second-highest increase in deaths following Hispanic Americans.⁴ While

¹ Written testimony of Juliet K. Choi, CEO of the Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum, House Committee on Energy & Commerce, Subcommittee on Health, Feb. 21, 2021. Available at: https://www.apiahf.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/2021_02_03_Testimony_Juliet_K_Choi_APIAHF_COVID_Vaccine_Hearing.pdf.

² <https://covidtracking.com/race>.

³ Testimony from the National Council of Asian Pacific Islander Physicians to the Committee on Ways and Means (June 9, 2020). Available at:

https://mcusercontent.com/d7f02dd24377959c916d14de6/files/5ebe9b24-21f8-4d67-93d2-4f218db2e323/NCAPIP_Statement_to_House_Ways_and_Means_Committee_on_COVID_19_Disparities.pdf.

⁴ Flagg A, Sharma D, Fenn L, Stobbe M. COVID-19's Toll on People of Color Is Worse Than We Knew. *The Marshall Project*.

anyone can be at risk for infection from the novel coronavirus, in the United States many systemic inequities, discrimination, and harmful social determinants of health have led to long-standing disparities in communities of color and other populations.

We appreciate the inclusion of funding for public outreach campaigns related to COVID-19 vaccines, testing, and contact tracing; however, it is imperative that these public outreach campaigns are culturally and linguistically accessible. Community-based organizations and Community Health Centers play an essential role in achieving these goals. They serve as public outreach partners in public education, and they ensure regular, transparent responses to community concerns around the distribution and safety of the vaccine. Communication and education will be key to combating hesitancy and this must include collaboration with and direct funding to community-based organizations.

APIAHF commends your advocacy and work to ensure that the next COVID relief package prioritizes and address health disparities exacerbated by COVID-19. Again, APIAHF supports the Energy and Commerce Committee's text providing targeted relief for communities disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Juliet K. Choi', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Juliet K. Choi
Chief Executive Officer
Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum

