



U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Ways and Means

Hearing on Overcoming Racism to Advance Economic Opportunity
April 6, 2022

Sung Yeon Choimorrow
Executive Director, National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum

Written Testimony

Thank you, Chairman Neal, Ranking Member Brady, and members of the committee. I am Sung Yeon Choimorrow, Executive Director of the National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF). At NAPAWF, we fight to ensure Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) communities have the economic power to work with dignity, make critical decisions about if or when to become parents, and are able to provide for their families and allow them to thrive.

A group of Asian American women founded NAPAWF 25 years ago to better amplify our community's stories and experiences. Since then, we've steadfastly pursued our mission to build power with AANHPI women and girls.

Through our chapters in Arizona, Chicago, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, New York City, Minnesota, and Texas, we center our organizing on the issues that most impact our community members, such as reproductive justice, economic justice, and immigrant rights. Our base spans all ages, all generations, and at least twenty different AANHPI ethnic groups.

We appreciate the committee's [commitment](#) to addressing the role of racism and other forms of discrimination in perpetuating health and economic inequalities in the United States. I hope my testimony today will provide you with an understanding of economic disparities in AANHPI communities.

At the heart of NAPAWF's work is our mission to dispel the so-called "model minority myth," which paints AANHPIs as a monolith, falsely generalizing our community as well-educated, prosperous, and successful. We are not all doctors, lawyers, or scientists. We did not all receive Ivy League educations. We do not all own our homes — and we certainly are not all good at math.

In fact, AANHPI women are overrepresented in both the frontline and low-wage workforces. We are home care workers, nail technicians, cooks and servers in restaurants.

According to NAPAWF’s recent analysis, in 2020 AANHPI women — working both full- and part-time — were paid, on average, 75 cents to the dollar. **However, disaggregated data shows many AANHPI women experience some of the largest pay gaps among all women.** For example, Bangladeshi and Pakistani women make just 50 cents for every dollar paid to their white male counterparts.

To make up for these lost wages, AANHPI women have no choice but to work more — to work longer hours, multiple jobs, and past retirement age. Millions of Asian American mothers live in multigenerational households, shouldering the dual responsibility of providing for our children and our elderly parents. More often than not, we’re also the primary earners for our families. For women already taking care of children, family members, and other loved ones, the wage gap poses an additional burden — making it even more difficult to provide emotional and economic support to our families and communities.

The truth is, AANHPI women live at a dangerous intersection of racial discrimination and economic injustice — iniquities that rob us of our agency over our lives, families, and communities. We’ve all witnessed the tragedies this disempowerment can cause. Six of the victims in the Atlanta spa shootings last year were Asian American women. They were targeted not because they were women, not because they were Asian, but because of their race, gender, and place of work — because being Asian American women spa workers in a racist, misogynistic, and xenophobic society made them vulnerable.

All of these threats have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased economic insecurity and reduced labor force participation across the country, but particularly among AANHPI women, who disproportionately work in retail, restaurant, and personal care positions. Although we make up just 2.9 percent of the overall workforce, we comprise 3.8 percent of the frontline workforce — and we are typically paid less than our white male counterparts in the same occupations.¹ Frontline and service sectors often don’t provide access to paid family and medical leave, forcing workers to make an impossible choice: either caring for a family member, or feeding their families.

I remember a nail technician I met years ago, when I was on parental leave after giving birth to my daughter. My job allowed me to take time off work to care for myself and my newborn. About 10 weeks postpartum I received a gift card to get my nails done so I went. The Asian American woman who cut, filed, and painted my nails, though, did not have the same luxury. When she and I got talking, I learned that she had given birth a month ago and was back at work because she could not afford to go without pay and she had no paid leave. She was a month postpartum and back at work and this is seared into my memory because I could barely function at 10 weeks postpartum and here was this woman back at work 4 weeks postpartum.

¹ Jasmine Tucker, “Asian American and Pacific Islander Women Lose \$10,000 Annually to the Wage Gap.” The National Women’s Law Center (March 2021).
<https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/AAPI-EPD-2021-v1.pdf>.

She is the face of AANHPI motherhood — yet she and her fellow working-class women are too often overlooked and underserved.

For many working-class AANHPI women, the expanded Child Tax Credit from July 2020 through December 2021 provided much-needed relief. Sending thousands of dollars to low-income and working parents, the expanded Child Tax Credit all but saved the lives of millions of families of color. A 2021 study found that more than a quarter of AANHPI women received advance Child Tax Credit payments in July of that year, and more than six in ten used their payments to buy food for their families.² These payments confirmed what research has long suggested: that AANHPI families, with financial insecurity and few childcare options, stand to particularly benefit from an expanded Child Tax Credit.³

Yet the failure to make the expansion permanent has plunged AANHPI families back into poverty.

Compounding such difficulties, in recent years Asian American families have been disproportionately plagued by long-term unemployment. NAPAWF's report on [Long-Term Unemployment Among Asian American and Pacific Islander Women](#) found that in 2020, AANHPI women experienced the highest rate of long-term unemployment of any racial or ethnic group in the U.S. Almost half (44 percent) of all AANHPI women who experienced job losses in 2020 had been out of work for longer than six months.

The model minority myth could easily make one believe that AANHPI women chose to stay home. Once, an Asian American reporter even suggested as much to me — that we were leaving the workforce because we could afford to, cushioned in the comforts of dual-earner households.

But statistic after statistic paints a different picture. In frontline jobs, AANHPI women workers have been among the most vulnerable to COVID-19, forcing many to choose between their work and their health. AANHPI women have also faced widespread safety threats, with almost a fifth (17 percent) of respondents in a [recent NAPAWF survey](#) reporting incidents of racism or discrimination at work over the past year. Immigration status plays a significant role in AANHPI women's employment as well. From March 2020 through February 2021, **immigrant women experienced the largest unemployment rates of any group in the U.S.⁴ — and Asian Americans make up nearly 30 percent of all U.S. immigrants.** Foreign-born AANHPI immigrants have higher rates of poverty compared to those born in the U.S.

² Sarah Javaid and Jasmine Tucker, "Women of Color Use Their Advance Child Tax Credit to Cover Food Costs." The National Women's Law Center (September 2021).
<https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/PulseWeek34FS.pdf>.

³ "Expansions of the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit Would Benefit Millions of Asian Americans." Center for Budget and Policy Priorities (September 2019).
<https://www.cbpp.org/research/federal-tax/expansions-of-the-earned-income-tax-credit-and-child-tax-credit-would-benefit>.

⁴ "U.S. Unemployment Trends by Nativity, Gender, Industry, & More, Before and During Pandemic." Migration Policy Institute (January 2022).
<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/migration-data-hub/us-unemployment-trends-during-pandemic>.

This is the Korean American restaurant worker who got laid off when the pandemic hit the food service industry. This is the Vietnamese American nail technician who had to leave her job to protect her immunocompromised parents. This is the Pakistani American personal care aide whose patients passed away.

Long-term unemployment does not just affect our community financially: it also has far-reaching consequences. Without stable and secure occupations, AANHPI women often cannot do what is best for themselves and their families. Their unemployment also exacerbates the gender and racial wage gap, contributing to the AANHPI community's economic insecurity as a whole.

In addition, unemployed or working, low-income Asian Americans are much less likely to have health insurance — some losing coverage once provided by their employers, some forced to rely on programs with restricted access such as Medicaid. Millions of Asian Americans receive health insurance through Medicaid or the Affordable Care Act.⁵ In 2020, about five million frontline workers — disproportionately Asian American — received health coverage through Medicaid.⁶ However, Medicaid remains inaccessible for another population which is disproportionately Asian and low-income: immigrant women. Under current laws, immigrants must live in the U.S. for five years before enrolling in Medicaid or the Children's Health Insurance Program. Undocumented immigrants are out of luck, barred from all public health insurance.

From health care to wages, unemployment to paid leave, the pattern is clear: AANHPI women, and all women of color, face undue risks of falling into poverty — and, once they hit the ground, they too often remain trapped there.

We thank the committee for recognizing this intersection of race, gender, and every identity that shapes an individual's experiences and opportunities. Moving forward, we hope the committee will match their awareness with action — by supporting universal health care coverage, universal paid family and medical leave, a permanent expansion of the Child Tax Credit, and passage of existing legislation such as the Women's Health Protection Act and the HEAL for Immigrant Families Act. Only then will AANHPI women and families be able to achieve true equity, prosperity, and justice.

Thank you again for the opportunity to join you today.

⁵ Rose C. Chu and Benjamin D. Sommers, "Health Insurance Coverage Changes Since Implementation of the Affordable Care Act: Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders." U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (May 2021).

<https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/private/pdf/265581/aspe-uninsured-trends-aapi-ib.pdf>.

⁶ Matt Broaddus, "5 Million Essential and Front-line Workers Get Health Coverage Through Medicaid." Center for Budget and Policy Priorities (August 2020).

<https://www.cbpp.org/blog/5-million-essential-and-front-line-workers-get-health-coverage-through-medicaid>.