June 30, 2020

Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
State Capitol Building, 1st Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Follow-up Requesting the Governor’s Timely Statewide Response to Anti-Asian American Discrimination During COVID-19

Dear Governor Newsom:

We greatly value your continued leadership in addressing the current public health and economic crises affecting all Californians and, in particular, those hardest hit. We are writing to follow-up on our letter to you dated April 24, 2020 requesting a timely statewide response to anti-Asian American discrimination during COVID-19.

Tracking Anti-AAPI Hate

As previously reported, COVID-19 has caused a dramatic rise in anti-Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) racism and xenophobia in California and nationwide.

On March 19, 2020, Chinese for Affirmative Action, Asian Pacific Policy & Planning Council, and the San Francisco State Asian American Studies Department launched a multilingual online reporting center Stop AAPI Hate to document and gather first-hand accounts of violent acts, hate incidents, and racial discrimination against AAPI residents. In a little over three months, Stop AAPI Hate has received over 2,000 incident reports, 43% of which come from California residents.

Update on What We Are Seeing in California

In the thirteen-week period since our launch, respondents from California have reported 832 incidents of COVID-19-related discrimination and harassment against Asian Americans. Averaging ten per day, these reports reveal a pervasive and consistent pattern of anti-Asian American hate in this state.
Breakdown of 832 reported incidents:

- Verbal harassment makes up the largest proportion (71.3%) of incidents.
- Physical assaults comprise 81, or almost one in ten of all, incident reports.
- Civil rights violations, such as workplace discrimination, refusal of service in business establishments and transportation, make up approximately 8% of reports.
- Women in California experience reported almost twice as many incidents of discrimination and harassment as men.
- 90 incidents of discrimination against elderly Asian Americans (11%) were reported in the past 13 weeks.

Recommendations

In our prior letter, we made recommendations based upon our data analysis and deep understanding of historical and existing barriers to trusting government agencies. Our recommendations include establishing a Racial Bias Strike Team comprised of key state agencies and departments that have jurisdiction over public education, implementing state and federal civil rights laws, policing workplace and employment discrimination, providing mental health services to vulnerable communities, and offering support to local Asian American-serving community-based organizations.

Given the continuing use of racist rhetoric to scapegoat Asian Americans by President Trump and other elected officials, it is even more critical that key state agencies work to proactively address anti-Asian American discrimination, harassment, and assaults. Specifically, we recommend the following: (1) strengthening the enforcement of existing laws that protect the rights of individuals and educate California businesses on those protections by authorized government agencies, such as the Department of Fair Employment and Housing; (2) engaging the state superintendent to urge school districts to declare their schools as safe havens and provide necessary policies and protocols to address biased-based bullying, (3) highlighting mechanisms for the provision of mental health services through Department of Health Care Services, and (4) utilizing the Department of Public Health’s Office of Health Equity to address the impacts of racism and xenophobia.

In the wake of George Floyd’s murder and demands to address structural racism and not just in policing, the Strike Team must appropriately include other communities of color disproportionately affected by the current crisis and calls for racial justice.
We were heartened by your prior statements condemning racism and xenophobia and your commitments that the State of California would go beyond monitoring the situation to taking bold action against it. We look forward to learning of concrete steps your administration will take to fight the spread of COVID-19-related hate against California’s Asian Americans.

We request a written response to this letter by July 15. Below is our contact information.

Sincerely,

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cc: Gina da Silva, Senior Policy Advisor for Immigration, Governor’s Office  
    Cat Nou, Chief Consultant for California API Legislative Caucus  
    Faith Lee, Consultant to the Senate Select Committee on Asian Pacific Islander Affairs