

## **Summary Report of Asian American AdvOCacy Summit: Stop Hate, Educate, Legislate**

OCA-DC's inaugural Asian American AdvOCacy Summit was convened on Saturday, September 25, 2021 via the video conferencing platform Zoom. Approximately — participants attended this conference. The full day conference consisted of four panels that hosted experts, community leaders, and policymakers from the Asian American community. The goal of the summit was to create practical policy solutions to combat Asian American hate and violence in multiple avenues and at the federal, state, and local levels. Each panel discussion, directly or indirectly, confronted aspects of anti-Asian hate and addressed broader solutions. This event and the funding for the interns who helped to plan and moderate the summit would not have been possible without support from the Westfield Corporation and OCA-DC, as well as sponsorships from State Farm, Chinatown Garden, and Maketto.

### **Panel 1 | Responding to Anti-Asian American Racial Violence**

Our first panel, “Responding to Anti-Asian American Racial Violence,” was moderated and put together by Amy Zhai, a freshman at Stanford University studying Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity and Public Policy. It featured a panel of four speakers: Aryani Ong (Founder of Montgomery County Progressive Asian American Network), Sookyung Oh (Executive Director of NAKASEC-VA), Janelle Wong (Professor at University of Maryland), and Jintana Williams (Tenant Organizer at CCED-LA). The panel also featured a guest statement from Keynote Speaker Senator Susan Lee.

Following the spa shootings in Atlanta, national attention turned to the cause of anti-Asian American racial violence through the “StopAAPIHate” movement. However, consensus in the Asian American community quickly diverged around how to address “hate” and violence. Carceral solutions, including the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Bill and increased funding for prosecutor’s offices, were quickly adopted by mainstream Asian American organizations and leaders at the expense of vilifying other communities of color, particularly Black Americans. In this panel, we refer to “racial violence” instead of hate to better encompass the range of systemic violence, including state violence, faced by Asian Americans that cannot fit into the framework of hate crimes. The objective of the panel was to understand the range of policy and community solutions to anti-Asian American racial violence, from ideas that incorporate some collusion with law enforcement to radical notions of community care.

### **Policy Recommendations**

#### **1. Invest in ethnic studies and dialogue about race**

Each speaker agreed on the importance of dialogue and education about the Asian American community to prevent racial violence and harassment. Traditional hate crime legislation cannot address how racist beliefs are created nor teach people the following things: 1) How to avoid internalized or structural racism?;, 2) Don’t remove socio-economic stresses that

undergird crimes, and 3) Don't create an inclusive society to make hate crimes less likely (from Aryani Ong). To avoid hate, we cannot "look at laws as our first response," and instead increase public understanding about Asian Americans and racism in an interpersonal manner. States are able to apply for grants under the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act that provide funding for education as opposed to sentencing.

## **2. Provide state support for victims of hate and violence**

Aryani Ong noted that hate crime laws also do not address the individual victim's needs. In order to support victims, Sookyung Oh recommended investing in state mental health support and encouraging Asian Americans to enter these fields.

## **3. Build coalitions with other people of color**

All panelists agreed on the importance of working in conjunction with other communities of color. Janelle Wong noted how media coverage of anti-Asian American hate overrepresented Black perpetrators and deepened a rift between our communities. Instead, we must find ways to address cross-cutting issues of racially motivated violence. Jintana Williams, who organizes in Los Angeles' Chinatown, described how protecting all multiethnic communities can be a compatible project. In fighting against gentrification and eviction, her organization had to form multiethnic coalitions who are united around systemic racism.

## **Panel 2 | A Conversation on Education**

The second panel was called "A Conversation on Education" moderated by Audrey Meigs, a junior Political Science major and East Asian Studies minor. Panelists included Dr. Chao Wu (chair of Howard County Board of Education and committee member of the Maryland Association of Boards of Education), Ms. Ginny Gong (President of the Gin G Group and former President of OCA National), Ms. Sheena Jordan (Diversity Coordinator of Glenelg Country School and DC's World Language teacher of the year in 2017), and Secretary Atif Qarni (Virginia's Secretary of Education and former Sergeant of the US Marine Corps).

Around 22.9 million people in the US identify as being of Asian heritage, hardly any mention of AAPI history occurs in social studies classrooms nationwide. This has detrimental effects on Asian students who often already struggle with their sense of identity and ties to America. If AAPI history is taught in schools, it is normally confined to a brief mention of the Japanese internment camps in school and possibly to the Chinese Exclusion Act. Even then, it is often not viewed from an Asian American perspective and neglects to teach the significant contributions Asian communities have made in the US. The lack of a detailed account on Asian history and its place in this country contributes to Asian Americans being viewed as foreign, thus increasing the violence that has surged against AAPI communities during the pandemic. In Georgia, state social studies standards for what fifth graders have to learn include Japan's responsibility for Pearl Harbor, but not the mass incarceration of Japanese-American citizens during WWII. In a 2017-2018 survey, 80% of public school teachers were white while only 2% of them were Asian. The recent fight for more AAPI curriculum in schools has largely been motivated by the anti-Asian hate incidents that have occurred in the midst of the pandemic. The Atlanta-shooting

specifically, in which six Asian women working at a salon were murdered, have sparked more conversations around the importance of education. The mental health and wellness of Asian and other BIPOC students must also be a top priority in our school systems through funding and implementing practices such as mindfulness and emotional regulation in our health classes.

## **Policy Recommendations**

### **1. Revamping School Curriculum**

The K-12 school curriculum needs to be revamped to include a comprehensive understanding of the contributions of Asian Americans in US history. This includes, but is not limited to, the study of geography, current civilizations, contemporary issues, and historical events. We also need to take into consideration how we are teaching our STEM classes which remain very white and euro-centric. Integrating Asian American history into our education system will help combat ignorance that fuels the idea that Asian Americans are “foreign” and not “true Americans”. Progress on reforming education curriculum can be seen in Illinois’ passage of the TEAACH Act that mandates a section of AAPI history to be taught in certain courses.

### **2. Increasing support to students from different backgrounds/communities in schools**

We must consider the unique experiences of Asian American (and other POC) students who have different barriers to learning than their white counterparts. Mental health, for example, is a large factor in students being unable to be fully engaged in their learning environment. Poor mental health may stem from the discrimination they face in schools, family situations, etc... We can teach anti-bullying in our schools by providing diversity and bystander intervention training to students and teachers. Diversity is a fact that we need to understand and respect in order to combat bullying and segregation. These trainings and support resources must receive comprehensive funding from our state, local, and federal governments through policy initiatives and grants.

### **3. Engage school boards, legislators, parents, and teachers**

Parents of Asian American students must be involved in their children’s education, but there are language and cultural barriers that prevent them from having a voice in these spaces (PTA, school boards, etc...) There is currently an establishment of an Asian American parent network in Montgomery County that has high rates of enrollment. A system like this can be implemented on a larger scale throughout DC. We also need more diverse members on our school board and more diverse teachers and legislators. A potential solution is to have school administrators and superintendents increase the recruitment of people of color when hiring teachers or electing members on the school board. Campaigning for legislators of diverse backgrounds is also crucial if we wish to mandate curriculum and support resources through policy.

## **Panel 3 | Confronting Gender-Based Violence**

The third panel of the summit was called “Confronting Gender-Based Violence.” Gabby DeBelen, a senior at the College of William & Mary studying Public Policy and Asian & Pacific Islander American Studies moderated the panel. Panelists included Tonia Bui ( 2nd Vice Chair of the Montgomery County Commission for Women), Krittik Ghosh (Executive Director of the Asian/Pacific Islander Domestic Violence Resource Project (DVRP), Nina Jusuf (co-founder

and Executive Director of National Organization of Asians & Pacific Islanders Ending Sexual Violence (NAPIESV), and Da Hae Kim (Legal Advocacy and Judicial Strategy Manager at the National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF)).

In March of 2021 following the spa shootings in Atlanta, Georgia, our community was reminded of how gender, race, and violence are inextricably intertwined. According to findings from the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Study, 1 in 3 women have experienced some form of physical violence or sexual violence, many at the hands of an intimate partner. However, according to Asian Pacific Institute on Gender Based Violence, that number could be higher for Asian American women, with anywhere from 21 to 55% of Asian women in the U.S. experiencing intimate physical or sexual violence during their lifetime. The objective of the panel was to understand how to support Asian American survivors of gender based violence and to share policy solutions centered around how individuals and organizations can combat gender based violence in the Asian American community.

### **Policy Recommendations**

#### **1. Prioritize and center survivors' conceptions of justice and healing**

Policies and organizations seeking to assist survivors must center survivors experiences and histories in their work. According to Jusuf, this means confronting our personal beliefs of what healing and justice might look for us and focusing on what the survivor wants and needs. Jusuf notes that in her work, she finds that survivors of sexual assault do not always want to seek criminal justice remedies, but first and foremost, survivors want support and acknowledgement from their own community that the rape happened. Ghosh also noted that in her work, many survivors consider going to the police as their last resort. Though these institutional partnerships can still be important, as Bui noted, we must ultimately center and listen to women's voices in these conversations.

#### **2. Increase funding for community-centered systems of support**

Community organizations primarily receive funding from the government on all levels, but these grants require continuous applications and smaller organizations must compete with larger, better funded, and more mainstream organizations for these grants. Ghosh emphasized the need for long-term, sustainable funding, which is currently not being provided. Da Hae shared a story about how after the Atlanta spa shootings, NAPAWF rallied AAPI organizations and asked the White House for \$300 million in support. The Biden administration gave only \$19 million instead. Funding needs to be increased and aligned with an organization's survivor-centered mission and values. Many of the services provided by smaller community organizations are not as easily benchmarked on a grant progress report – Jusuf gave an example of the New Mexico Asian Family Center that provides community rest circles that build trust and communication in lieu of the typical support group model. As such, it is critical that funding is not only long term but also accessible for smaller non profit organizations.

#### **3. Challenge systems of inequity**

Survivors of gender-based violence can experience multiple forms of oppression and violence, including racism, homophobia, Islamophobia, poverty, etc. as noted by Ghosh. Ghosh also observed that survivors who access DVRP services often are immigrants with limited English proficiency, have non-citizen immigration statuses, and because of the pandemic, are more isolated. These all equate to less access to resources that can assist survivors in seeking help. Kim also noted that the variety of immigration statuses in the Asian American community

can hinder women from achieving economic independence and accessing social welfare services like Medicaid or SNAP (food stamps). The inequities of class, immigration, and race must be challenged to assist survivors of gender-based violence, for as long as those inequities still exist, it makes it more difficult for survivors to access safety.

#### **4. Collect and disaggregate data**

Data disaggregation is key to understanding the scope of gender-based violence in the Asian American community. Kim noted that AAPIs are often lumped together as a larger section of one whole data set instead of being broken down by ethnicity. This can obscure the prevalence of different types of gender based violence in specific AAPI ethnic communities and can obscure specific challenges survivors might face. Bui also noted that the lack of data makes it more difficult for local advocates to reach out to the Asian American community. Without those statistics, local advocates cannot target the particular language accessibility issues or other cultural needs in a community.

### **Panel 4 | Addressing Asian Leadership**

The fourth and final panel of the summit was called “Advancing Asian Leadership.” It was moderated by Lincoln Le, a sophomore at Georgetown University studying Government, with a double minor in Journalism and Women and Gender Studies. The panel consisted of four panelists with very distinct backgrounds and specialties. Tammy Higa Seaver is the Assistant Vice President of the Customer Care Center for State Farm. She has a history of supporting Diversity and Inclusion and safe work environments while serving various leadership positions. Paul Tiao is a partner of Hunton Andrews Kurth’s multidisciplinary cyber and physical security task force and its energy sector security team. He assists fortune 500 companies with national security and privacy issues. Tiao was also a senior official in the U.S. department of justice and is currently a board member of OCA-DC and a national advocate for AAPI issues. Judge Chung Pak made Maryland State history by becoming the third Chief Administrative Law Judge of the Maryland Office of Administrative Hearings, and the first-ever minority Chief Administrative Law Judge. Sue Ann Hong is the President & CEO of the Center for Asian Pacific American Women (CAPAW). She infuses the philosophy of building trusting relationships, collaborating and bringing people together to achieve common goals.

The focus of this panel addressed Asian American leadership, or the lack thereof. The AAPI community is widely stereotyped as the “model minority” –wealthy, hard-working, and successful individuals. This stereotype hurts Asian Americans by holding them up as a model of success, erasing the struggles they face, and ignoring the wide disparity among different Asian communities. Asian Americans represent approximately 5% of the U.S. population and are projected to account for 9% of the population by 2050. However, they account for only 0.3% of corporate officers, less than 1% of corporate board members, and about 2% of college presidents, despite their higher representation in business and professional occupations.

### **Policy Recommendations**

#### **1. Invest in Education and Awareness**

Diversity and inclusion, implicit bias, and equity are all practices that need to be implemented in every life cycle of employment, i.e., recruitment, professional development,

career advancement and retention of underrepresented population groups in the workplace. Big corporations must stop promoting Western-style types of leadership and need to reassess their hiring practices –allowing space for cultural components to shine. Employee research groups provide strategic business practices and the best business practices always involve a good relationship between the leaders of the company and the people who work below them. The model minority myth needs to be eliminated in political office, high government, and the media.

## **2. Affirm Affirmative Action**

Affirmative action is about getting people who are qualified to receive equal opportunity in the workplace , despite popular belief about it being a system of cheating . Data shows that diversity impacts the bottom line of the leadership pipeline. Workers, junior-staffers, and others alike pass the diversity and equity check, but never advance to the top. This impacts the company in a way where they can boast their high levels of diversity, but we'll never see much of it in the higher levels of office and governance and it is important to have each one equitably represent each other.

## **3. Foster Asian American Leaders**

Mentorship is one of the most important steps in fostering Asian American leaders. Allowing the youth to see leaders that look like them and then further receive guidance will advance their ambitions and confidence to take on various leadership roles. Getting into senior positions requires you to understand the business, or in some cases, the game. Pay gaps are usually associated with individuals not willing to negotiate salary or promotion and community mentorship can help mitigate this issue. Obstacles for success start young and when aspiring leaders can learn how to combat these obstacles early, they can grow and succeed faster than previous generations of Asian American leaders.

## **4. Broaden the Role of Leadership**

Private and public sectors of business and governance need to recognize that AAPI women are disproportionately represented in leadership. Solutions to this issue revolve around the need to change the status quo when bringing up western centric methods of leadership and hiring practices. There needs to be a change in corporate culture that will allow women of color the necessary opportunities to rise up in ranks. Women let others tell the narrative for them but they need to actively build their own brand based on their personal intention and values.

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*“Embracing the hopes and aspirations of Asian Pacific Americans”*