

The Honorable Grace Meng

40-13, 159th Street Flushing, NY 11358

March 11, 2023,

**Dear the Honorable Congresswoman, Meng**

I am Jenna Lee, a student at Alliance University School of Social Work and registered voter in your district. I appreciate your legislative efforts to ensure the rights of minorities in New York, including Asian Americans, Blacks, Hispanics, women, children, and immigrants.

Specifically, I am writing to thank you for your efforts to pass the COVID-19 Hate Crime Act, which was intended to address the increase in hate crimes and violence against Asian Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic. I noticed that this significant bill was introduced by you and Senator Mazie Hirono. This bill was passed by a vote of 364-62 on May 18, 2021, and President Biden signed it on May 20, 2021.

As I understand it, the law directs the Department of Justice to expedite its review of hate crimes related to the COVID-19 pandemic and to provide guidance to state and local law enforcement agencies on how to establish hate crime reporting processes. Though I applaud the legislation for investing in criminal law enforcement for hate crimes against Asian Americans, I remain of the opinion that the legislation falls short of addressing the overwhelming majority of incidents. Asian Americans must be protected from hate and intolerance with this important first step. Moreover, this bill fails to address the mental health issues that a majority of Asian Americans have faced during the COVID-19 epidemic.

Psychological distress is aggravated by an outbreak of infectious diseases, such as COVID-19 (Bao et al., 2020). At least four-in-ten U.S. adults have experienced high levels of psychological distress during COVID-19 pandemic, according to Pew Research (Pasquini and Keeter, 2022). Furthermore, Asian Americans suffer more mental health issues than their counterparts of other ethnicities due to racism and discrimination. As a result of the current COVID-19 pandemic, Asian Americans have been targeted for verbal and physical violence, harassment, and social stigma. In a series of New York Times articles, there have been reports of anti-Asian sentiments and racist incidents towards Chinese Americans and others of East Asian descent (Hong, 2020; Konstantinides, 2020; Tavernise and Oppel 2020; Yang, 2020a). Racial attacks against Asian Americans are on the rise according to the New York Police Department's crime report (Yang, 2020b). The COVID-19-related racial discrimination against Asian Americans was reported to a reporting center established by community advocacy groups and San Francisco State University in just six weeks (Choi and Kulkarni, 2020). Additionally, Asian women are more likely to be harassed and physically attacked (Young, 2020). Asian women are

three times more likely than men to report harassment related to COVID-19, according to a report from A3PCON and CAA (Jeung, 2020).

The challenges Asian Americans face not only threaten their personal well-being, but also negatively impact their mental health. Research studies confirm that racial discrimination significantly increases the risk of mental health problems (Priest et al, 2013). Among Asian Americans (Gee et al., 2007), racial discrimination was associated with greater risks of mental health issues, including anxiety disorder and depression.

Taking note of the strong negative effects the Coronavirus pandemic has had on mental health, the World Health Organization (2020) has issued a public statement urging countries to invest more in mental health services for those with mental health problems or at risk of mental health problems. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the statement also called for addressing disrupted mental health services and finding alternative ways to deliver mental health care. Therefore, it is essential to take steps to ensure that people receive the mental health care they need during this difficult time.

Thus, I urge you to review the mental health issues that Asian Americans have faced during COVID-19 and to introduce a relevant bill to address them. To address their mental health issues, Asian Americans need adequate care and services. In spite of this, Asian Americans face discrimination since there are few culturally competent services and programs. We must take action to resolve these systematic problems and enhance the mental health and well-being of Asian Americans who have contributed to the economic and social development of the country. To ensure that Asian Americans have access to the necessary resources to effectively address their mental health needs, we must strive to create more culturally sensitive services and programs while addressing the systemic issues of discrimination. This will ensure that Asian Americans are equipped with the necessary support to thrive and contribute to our society.

Sincerely,



Jenna Lee

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