

United States Senate

May 1, 2020

The Honorable Robert R. Redfield, M.D.
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30333

Dear Director Redfield:

We write to express our deep concern about the surge in discrimination and hate crimes against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the currently inadequate federal response to address these racist and xenophobic attacks, a sharp break from the efforts of past administrations, Republican and Democratic alike. We strongly urge you to take concrete steps to address the disturbing increase in anti-Asian discrimination, as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has done in the past.

Since the COVID-19 outbreak began, researchers have reported an alarming spike in anti-Asian racism. On March 14, 2020, a man stabbed two Asian American children – a 2-year-old and a 6-year-old – and their father at a Sam’s Club in Texas because “he thought the family was Chinese, and infecting people with the coronavirus.”¹ In the past month alone, the Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council and its partners have received nearly 1,500 reports of coronavirus-related harassment and discrimination against AAPI individuals across the country.²

Despite warnings that using offensive and stigmatizing language to refer to COVID-19 could stoke anti-Asian bias, President Trump and his administration’s officials have referred to the coronavirus as the “Chinese Virus,” “Wuhan Virus,” and at least one White House official even called it the “Kung Flu.”³ Such harmful rhetoric contradicts guidance by public health experts. The World Health Organization’s guidance in naming infectious diseases warns against using names that stigmatize certain communities, as such use has “provoke[d] a backlash” against these communities in the past and “can have serious consequences for peoples’ lives and livelihoods.”⁴

¹ Josh Margolin, *FBI warns of potential surge in hate crimes against Asian Americans amid coronavirus*, ABC NEWS, March 27, 2020, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/fbi-warns-potential-surge-hate-crimes-asian-americans/story?id=69831920>.

² Marina Fang, *Advocates Collect Nearly 1,500 Reports Of Anti-Asian Racism In The U.S. Over The Past Month*, HUFFPOST, April 24, 2020, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/asian-american-reports-racism-coronavirus_n_5ea2cfa8c5b6d376358dd3be.

³ Katie Rogers, Lara Jakes and Ana Swanson, *Trump Defends Using ‘Chinese Virus’ Label, Ignoring Growing Criticism*, N.Y. TIMES, March 19, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/18/us/politics/china-virus.html>.

⁴ World Health Organization, *WHO issues best practices for naming new human infectious diseases*, May 8, 2015, <https://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/notes/2015/naming-new-diseases/en/>.

The CDC has also recognized the “stigma and discrimination [that] can occur when people associate a disease, such as COVID-19, with a population or nationality.”⁵ Yet the CDC has not taken meaningful steps to address the surge in anti-Asian discrimination, as it had during the 2003 SARS outbreak. In 2003, CDC launched a 14-member, multidisciplinary community outreach team to address the increase in stigma and hostility against AAPI individuals in the same week it reported the first confirmed cases of SARS. The outreach team organized meetings with AAPI leaders and community members, monitored Asian-language news media, and conducted community visits and events. To target its outreach, CDC also monitored stigmatizing behavior in the general public, analyzed thousands of calls to CDC’s public hotline, and worked with AAPI communities to develop a culturally tailored response.⁶

There are more than 20 million Americans of Asian descent, and 2 million AAPI individuals are working on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic, as health care workers, law enforcement agents, first responders, and other essential service providers. The CDC must do more to ensure that the needs of *all* Americans are addressed during this pandemic.

To that end, we ask that CDC immediately (1) develop and publicly release a plan that sets forth how CDC will address the surge in coronavirus-related stigma and hostility against AAPI individuals, and (2) establish a multidisciplinary community outreach team that will work with AAPI communities to create a culturally tailored response, as it did in 2003. We also request that CDC respond by May 15, 2020, to inform Congress what steps it has taken to address to the increase in anti-Asian harassment and discrimination since the COVID-19 outbreak began.

Thank you in advance for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

/s/ Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

/s/ Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator

/s/ Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator

/s/ Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

⁵ CDC, *Reducing Stigma*, March 30, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/reducing-stigma.html>.

⁶ Alexia Fernández Campbell and Alex Ellerbeck, *Federal agencies are doing little about the rise in anti-Asian hate*, NBC NEWS, April 16, 2020, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/federal-agencies-are-doing-little-about-rise-anti-asian-hate-n1184766>; Bobbie Person, et al., *Fear and Stigma: The Epidemic within the SARS Outbreak*, EMERGING INFECTIOUS DISEASES, February 2004, https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/eid/article/10/2/03-0750_article.

/s/ Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

/s/ Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

/s/ Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator

/s/ Mark R. Warner
United States Senator

/s/ Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator

/s/ Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

/s/ Jack Reed
United States Senator

/s/ Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

/s/ Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator