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Cisneros condemns racism towards Asian American and Pacific Islander community

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JASON SANCHEZ

APRIL 29, 2020

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California Rep. for the 39th district Gil Cisneros held a virtual town hall on Monday via Facebook Live to discuss the rise in discrimination against the Asian American and Pacific Islander community as a result of COVID-19.

Cisneros condemned the “racist, discriminatory and xenophobic language and actions” that the Asian American and Pacific Islander community has experienced, adding that his office is available as a resource with staff members who speak Chinese, Korean and Spanish.

Representatives of Asian American and Pacific Islander organizations spoke during the town hall, as well as California Rep. Judy Chu of the 27th District, which includes Pasadena and the west San Gabriel Valley.

Chu said that the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, which she is the chair of, is working hard to keep the issue at the forefront of their COVID-19 response.

Chu also cited legislation that combats Asian American and Pacific Islander discrimination in response to COVID-19 including H.R. 3545, otherwise known as the No Hate Act.

Virginia Congressman Don Beyer introduced the act to push for more accurate and efficient reporting of hate crimes across the nation in order for the Federal Bureau of Investigation to gather statistics and take action, Chu said.

She added that the act will create grants for both state-run hate crime hotlines and law enforcement in order to better address hate crimes, as well as allow judges to require community service from those convicted.

“Unfortunately, Donald Trump has made it a priority to stoke xenophobia and direct anger at immigrants and communities of color throughout his time in the White House,” Chu said. “As the American public becomes more critical of the president’s delayed and inefficient response to the coronavirus pandemic, he began using the word ‘Chinese virus’ as a way to deflect anger from himself.”

Stewart Kwoh, founder of Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Los Angeles, spoke about the work his organization has been doing to tackle discrimination, which includes tracking hate crimes and uplifting “the role of Asian Americans on the frontlines as nurses, doctors, researchers (and) contributors” in the fight against COVID-19.

Manjusha Kulkarni, executive director of the recently established Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council, said the organization

has tracked over 1500 anti-Asian American hate incidents across the country.

The numbers and trends collected from the tracker indicate that 44% of these incidents happened at businesses such as grocery stores and pharmacies, and that the elderly make up 9% of those victims, Kulkarni said.

In response to these data points, Kulkarni said her group is working on the issue with attorneys general and human relations commissions across the country.

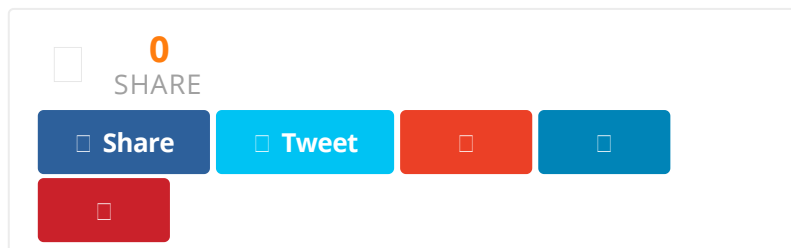
Yuka Ogino, a resident of Brea, was emotional while sharing an encounter with a man at Target.

"As I was walking by, he just started yelling at me that I was going to get him sick, and I got really scared so I ran out of the store. I wasn't able to pick up my parent's prescription," Ogino said.

Another commenter spoke about an incident in February near Pershing Square in Los Angeles, when a lady yelled at him to cover his mouth and called him a racial slur for coughing as he got off the subway, even though he was already wearing a mask.

Alison Lehmann Edwards, the chief executive officer of Orange County Human Relations, said that while no hate crimes have been prosecuted in 2020, she does not want people to be discouraged.

"We have to get involved and engaged to make sure that we keep demanding that level of leadership, that our leaders know that this is important to our constituencies — and not just when it's hitting one community — that we're consistently sending these messages, and that we're not relying on the people who are targeted to be the only ones sending these messages that we're all standing up as allies to say, 'This is important to all of us and for all of us,'" Edwards said.



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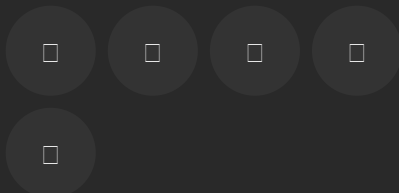
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