

May 17, 2021

Chairman Dolan, Vice-Chairwoman Gavarone and Ranking Member Sykes, members of the Senate Finance Committee. My name is Joe Mazzola, Health Commissioner with Franklin County Public Health. On behalf of our board of health, I am presenting testimony today to denounce and condemn hate crimes and acts of violence, racism, sexism, and discrimination perpetrated against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and to actively support an amendment offered by Senator Tina Maharath which will create the Ohio Asian American and Pacific Islander Affairs Commission and the Office of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

In the last year, we've seen an uptick in violence against Asian Americans, and we understand, over time, there's been a lack of awareness amongst the broader community to recognize the longstanding mistreatment and oppression of AAPI communities. A recent study reported nearly 80% of Asian Americans say they do not feel respected and are discriminated against in the U.S.; and 37% of white Americans say they are not aware of an increase in hate crimes and racism against Asian Americans over the past year, with 24% saying anti-Asian American racism isn't a problem that should be addressed<sup>1</sup>.

Franklin County Public Health is committed to combating racism and discrimination against Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities. With the support of the Board of Health, in 2019 FCPH adopted its current Strategic Plan with one goal to incorporate equity as the foundation for conducting its daily work. In 2020 the Board of Health declared racism a public health crisis, adopted a Health and Equity in All Policies (HEiAP) policy and formalized an external Equity Advisory Council (EAC), representing 28 community partners- many in the AAPI community.

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<sup>1</sup> Leading Asian Americans to Unite for Change (LAAUNCH) STAATUS Index 2021 [https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/5f629e7e013d961943d5cec9/6098a7be3d627168e03054da\\_staatus-index-2021.pdf](https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/5f629e7e013d961943d5cec9/6098a7be3d627168e03054da_staatus-index-2021.pdf)

The EAC's Mission is to support and collaborate with FCPH to improve the quality of life for communities of color, vulnerable and marginalized populations in Franklin County by addressing the underlying root causes of racism within systems and defining the standard for equitable treatment and service delivery. The Equity Advisory Council continues to be instrumental in weighing in on our Covid-19 response and strategic decision-making, especially regarding equitable vaccine distribution. We are intentional about partnering with organizations, such as the Ohio Asian American Health Coalition and the Asian American Community Services, to share resources and information to ensure our efforts are equitable and customized to communities most in need.

We believe that hatred and discrimination which targets any group is an attack on our entire community and must therefore be condemned wherever and whenever they arise<sup>2</sup>. In response to the attack in Georgia on March 16, 2021, when eight victims were killed, including six of Asian descent, FCPH joined the collective actions to address hate wherever it exists. We recognize the intersections of racism, bigotry, xenophobia and sexism, impacting AAPI communities and other communities of color.

According to Stop AAPI Hate, a coalition formed in response to the uptick in anti-Asian xenophobia linked to the Covid-19 pandemic, 3,795 incidents were reported to its center from March 19, 2020 to February 28, 2021. These reports represent only a fraction of the number of hate incidents that occurred; however, it does show how vulnerable Asian Americans are to discrimination, and the types of discrimination they face<sup>3</sup>. Types of discrimination noted in the coalition's report include: verbal harassment (68.1%) and shunning (20.5%) (i.e., the deliberate avoidance of Asian Americans), physical assault (11.1%) and civil rights violations<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://crms.franklincountyohio.gov/RMSWeb/pdfs/R14540.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> According to the Pew Research Center survey, three in 10 Asian Americans (31%) report having experienced racial slurs or racist jokes since the beginning of the pandemic. See <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/07/01/many-black-and-asian-americans-say-they-have-experienced-discrimination-amid-the-covid-19-outbreak/>.

<sup>4</sup> <https://secureservercdn.net/104.238.69.231/a1w.90d.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/210312-Stop-AAPI-Hate-National-Report-.pdf>

We must remember to acknowledge the AAPI's contributions to the field of public health are immeasurable, and we are paying tribute to those historical accomplishments throughout the month of May for Asian Pacific American Heritage Month. We believe in the importance of AAPI representation and providing cultural learning and awareness for our workforce and partners.

We support the goal of this amendment to create a state commission and state office for Asian American and Pacific Islander affairs and look forward to continuing to work with the members of the Ohio Legislature, other local health departments, and expanding partnerships with private, nonprofit and public entities with a shared purpose of dismantling racism and discrimination perpetrated against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. Public health is in a unique position to contribute data and to convene community partners to inform the work of the commission and align with local efforts. Franklin County Public Health stands ready to assist in playing its role to support our community and the state to move forward.

Thank you for your time and I would be happy to answer any questions.

Joe Mazzola, MPA  
Health Commissioner  
Franklin County Public Health