



February 26, 2020

Dear Colleagues,

As Members of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC), we write to urge all Members of Congress to help us prevent hysteria, ignorant attacks, and racist assaults that have been fueled by misinformation pertaining to the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19). As elected representatives, we have a responsibility during a public health crisis to use our unique platform to calm our constituents' fears, not stoke them. We therefore encourage all Members of Congress to share only confirmed and verifiable information about COVID-19 and dispel misinformation.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, we have seen a surge of discriminatory rhetoric and violent attacks against Asian Americans across the country. Often the attackers have been inspired by debunked conspiracy theories about the origin of the virus and how it spreads. Others repeat mistaken information, such as claiming that all people from China need to be quarantined for two weeks, when that guidance is actually intended specifically for those returning from a prolonged trip to China, regardless of their ethnic background. Asian-owned businesses have also been negatively impacted due to fraudulent flyers purporting to come from the World Health Organization urging residents to avoid Asian American restaurants and businesses due to COVID-19.

The risk of becoming infected with COVID-19 is not from ethnicity. It is from prolonged exposure to the virus, which is why the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has emphasized that while “the potential public health threat posed by the virus is high, both globally and in the United States, for the general American public, who are unlikely to be exposed to this virus at this time, the immediate health risk from COVID-19 is considered low.” Person-to-person spread of COVID-19 has been seen in the United States among close contacts – such as spouses – of returned travelers from Wuhan, China, but at this time, this virus is not currently spreading in the community in the United States.

Despite that fact, Asian Americans have been targets of suspicion and, in some cases, violence. For instance, in New York, a woman on the subway was attacked by someone calling her a “diseased b\*\*\*\*” because she wore a face mask. In Indiana, two Hmong guests checking in at a

hotel were told that Asians were not welcome. And in California, a 16-year-old high school student was sent to the emergency room after being attacked by bullies who accused him of having the coronavirus simply because of his ethnicity. Even just looking Asian has been enough to incite attackers to hurl insults and accuse individuals of being disease carriers. With the proper guidance from Members of Congress and other public officials, these kinds of attacks can be avoided.

However, we have been disappointed and dismayed that some in Congress continue to push unfounded theories about the disease, including the conspiracy theory that COVID-19 was created in a lab in China. Scientists who have studied the make-up of the virus have determined that there are no indications this was designed in a lab, but that has not stopped some from spreading this rumor, which serves only to create mistrust and fear of China and those perceived to be of Chinese ethnicity.

Let us be clear: the dissemination of false information about COVID-19 is dangerous for public health and for American citizens who are increasingly becoming the victims of racist and xenophobic attacks. Our constituents are understandably worried about the spread of this disease and are looking to us for guidance and reassurance. But sharing inaccurate information or unconfirmed reports runs the risk of increasing fears and inciting violence. That is why we encourage you to consult with the CDC and the World Health Organization, as well as your local public health agencies, to ensure that your advice to constituents is accurate and does not stoke unfounded fears.

The best way to stop the spread of coronavirus is to wash your hands, not perpetuate racist stereotypes. We ask for your help in spreading this message, to help stem both the public health crisis and the deeply disturbing racism targeting the Asian American community.

Thank you,

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Judy Chu  
Member of Congress  
CAPAC Chair

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Grace Meng  
Member of Congress  
CAPAC First Vice Chair

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Mark Takano  
Member of Congress  
CAPAC Second Vice Chair

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Ted W. Lieu  
Member of Congress  
CAPAC Whip

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Ed Case  
Member of Congress

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Gilbert R. Cisneros, Jr.  
Member of Congress

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Tulsi Gabbard  
Member of Congress

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Jimmy Gomez  
Member of Congress

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Al Green  
Member of Congress

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Pramila Jayapal  
Member of Congress

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Ro Khanna  
Member of Congress

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Barbara Lee  
Member of Congress

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Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan  
Member of Congress

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Nanette Diaz Barragán  
Member of Congress

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Suzanne Bonamici  
Member of Congress

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Suzan DelBene  
Member of Congress

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Anna G. Eshoo  
Member of Congress

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Deb Haaland  
Member of Congress

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Alan Lowenthal  
Member of Congress

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Grace Napolitano  
Member of Congress

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Katie Porter  
Member of Congress

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Linda T. Sánchez  
Member of Congress

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Jackie Speier  
Member of Congress