



DUCKWORTH, WARREN, HIRONO CALL FOR FEDERAL AGENCIES TO ADDRESS CORONAVIRUS-RELATED ATTACKS AGAINST ASIAN AMERICANS

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Community News, Politics, Health, Civil Rights

Sens. Mazie Hirono, Tammy Duckworth and Elizabeth Warren (NBC)

WASHINGTON – Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-Ill.) joined Sens. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) and Mazie K. Hirono (D-Hawaii) on April 10 in leading a letter to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (USCCR) urging it to issue guidance to federal agencies on preventing and addressing anti-Asian racism and xenophobia related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“There has not been a concerted effort from federal agencies to prevent and address anti-Asian sentiment related to the COVID-19 pandemic,” the lawmakers wrote. “In order to reduce the dangerous and hateful spread of anti-Asian sentiment that is on the rise during this pandemic, we respectfully request that USCCR issue such guidance without delay, and that it take into account language accessibility for Asian Americans with limited English proficiency.”

As the COVID-19 outbreak continues to spread across the country, reports of physical and verbal attacks against Asian Americans associated with the virus have spiked. There has been a surge of reports of incidents of racist and xenophobic attacks against Asian Americans to tip lines and news outlets across the country, with reports of many Asian Americans expressing fear for their physical safety and that of their family members and friends. Additionally, anti-Asian stigma has led to a reported slump in activity in Asian-owned restaurants and businesses.

Anti-Asian sentiment relating to COVID-19 has been voiced by certain members of the federal government, including President Trump and several members of Congress, who have used harmful and stigmatizing language when referring to COVID-19 as “the Chinese virus,” “the China virus,” “the Wuhan virus” or “kung-flu” despite warnings that use of the terms would cause harm to Asian Americans, and despite World Health Organization guidance discouraging the use of naming diseases based on geographic location.

Along with Duckworth, Warren and Hirono, the letter was also signed by Sens. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.), Cory Booker (D-N.J.), Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.), Kamala D. Harris (D-Calif.), Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.), Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.), Jacky Rosen (D-Nev.), Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) and Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.).

The full text of the letter follows.

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Dear Chair [Catherine] Lhamon:

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We write to request that the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (USCCR) issue guidance to federal agencies on preventing and addressing anti-Asian racism and xenophobia related to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

The U.S. now has more confirmed cases of COVID-19 than any other country. Researchers and advocacy organizations have reported a spike in physical and verbal attacks against Asian Americans that has been associated with the public health crisis.

There has been a "surge" of reports of incidents of racist and xenophobic verbal attacks and physical assault against Asian Americans to tip lines and news outlets across the country, with reports of many Asian Americans expressing fear for their physical safety and that of their family members and friends. In addition, anti-Asian stigma has led to a reported slump in activity in Asian-owned restaurants and businesses.

Alarming, anti-Asian sentiment relating to COVID-19 has been voiced even by certain members of the federal government. President Trump and several members of Congress have insisted on using harmful and stigmatizing language, referring to COVID-19 as "the Chinese virus" or the "China virus," despite warnings that use of the term would cause harm to Asian Americans.

This approach has contradicted that of public health experts and other officials in the Trump Administration, including the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), who agreed that the use of terms was "absolutely wrong and inappropriate."

The World Health Organization (WHO) has issued guidance discouraging the use of naming diseases based on geographic location, warning that "certain disease names provoke a backlash against members of particular religious or ethnic communities," adding, "[t]his can have serious consequences for peoples' lives and livelihoods."

Instead, WHO recommends using "generic descriptive terms," saying "[i]f the pathogen that causes the disease is known, it should be part of the disease name (e.g. coronavirus, influenza virus, salmonella)."

On March 20, 2020, USCCR issued a statement condemning the rise in anti-Asian racism and xenophobia, specifically discouraging elected officials from using such terms. In its statement, USCCR wrote: "This latest wave of xenophobic animosity toward Asian Americans should not be normalized or encouraged by public officials characterizing COVID-19 as the 'Chinese coronavirus' or 'Chinese virus.'"

There has not been a concerted effort from federal agencies to prevent and address anti-Asian sentiment related to the COVID-19 pandemic. On March 4, 2020, the U.S. Department of Education issued guidance to schools about their obligation to address and prevent bullying of students of Asian descent related to COVID-19. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) also announced that it has updated its COVID-19 guidance to note that "investigating hate crimes remain[s] a high priority for the FBI."

But there must be more robust efforts across the federal government to respond to hateful actions and discrimination against Asian Americans.

In order to reduce the dangerous and hateful spread of anti-Asian sentiment that is on the rise during this pandemic, we respectfully request that USCCR issue such guidance without delay, and that it take into account language accessibility for Asian Americans with limited English proficiency.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

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