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... to anti-Asian harassment amid COVID-19 crisis

Asian American groups and LGBTQ allies demand response to anti-Asian harassment amid COVID-19 crisis

Advocates say political leaders need to stand up against rhetoric that scapegoats Asians for current pandemic

By John Riley on May 1, 2020 @JohnAndresRiley

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Photo: National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum.

Asian American groups and allies, including national and local LGBTQ organizations, are calling on D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser to call out what advocates say is a spike in racist harassment and attacks directed against members of the Asian American community amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

The National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum **launched a petition** calling on Bowser to stand with the community amid these attacks, which they note have escalated due to rhetoric by politicians, including President Trump, surrounding the Chinese origins of COVID-19.

According to the petition, Asian Americans in D.C. have been **yelled at and threatened**, and Asian-American women have reported twice as many instances of hate, violence, and harassment compared to men. Several NAPAWF members and staff say they've personally experienced verbal harassment and abuse.

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POLL

President "Dr." Trump, "Self-Proclaimed Medical Genius" is advocating using disinfectants to treat COVID-19. What do you think would work best?!

- Lysol
- Clorox Bleach
- Isopropyl Alcohol
- Fantastic
- Any Toilet Cleaner will do wonders
- Trump is insane and dangerous, and should self-distance from the rest of the country. Doesn't the moon need a hotel?

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For instance, Da Hae Kim, an NAPAWF staff member and D.C. resident, recounts stepping out of her house with her partner, with the intention of going for a drive to break up the monotony of working from home, only to be accosted by a woman screaming at her.

"It took me a moment to register, but she was shouting, 'Y'all started it!' over and over," Kim said in a statement. "My partner and I were both wearing masks, so it took her a moment to notice my partner isn't Asian and stop yelling. She made a face that read, 'Oops,' laughed, and ducked into the passenger side of the car parked behind ours. A man was seated on the driver's side, laughing.

"Sitting in the car, I didn't now what to do. I didn't want to make the situation worse but also wanted to stand up for myself," Kim continued. "But at this point, I've seen enough photos online of bloodied Asian faces."

See also: [Gay Asian Americans viewed as more "American" than their straight peers, study finds](#)

Kim says she's now hyper-aware of her surroundings, and has begun limiting the amount of time she spends outside, even avoiding brief walks around her block. When she does, she avoids going out alone.

"My heart beats really fast when I walk past someone and I feel myself actively avoiding all eye contact," she said. "I feel myself getting smaller."

So far, 23 national and local organizations have signed the petition, including Act To Change, the D.C. chapter of the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, Empowering Pacific Islander Communities, the Human Rights Campaign, In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda, the National Center for Transgender Equality, the National Council of Jewish Women, the National Organization for Women, the National Women's Law Center, People For the American Way, and URGE: Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity, to name a few.

"Asian American women in D.C. are increasingly alarmed that we'll be targeted with harassment and violence because of our race, ethnicity, or national origin if we step outside to get groceries or go to work," Sung Yeon Choimorrow, the executive director of NAPAWF, said in a statement.

"Mayor Bowser has a critical role to play in denouncing the racist misinformation around the coronavirus and ensuring the safety of our Asian American community. We believe a community response — not a law enforcement response — will be the most effective. We're safer if our neighbors know about the risk we're taking every time we venture outside and are engaged in being part of the solution."

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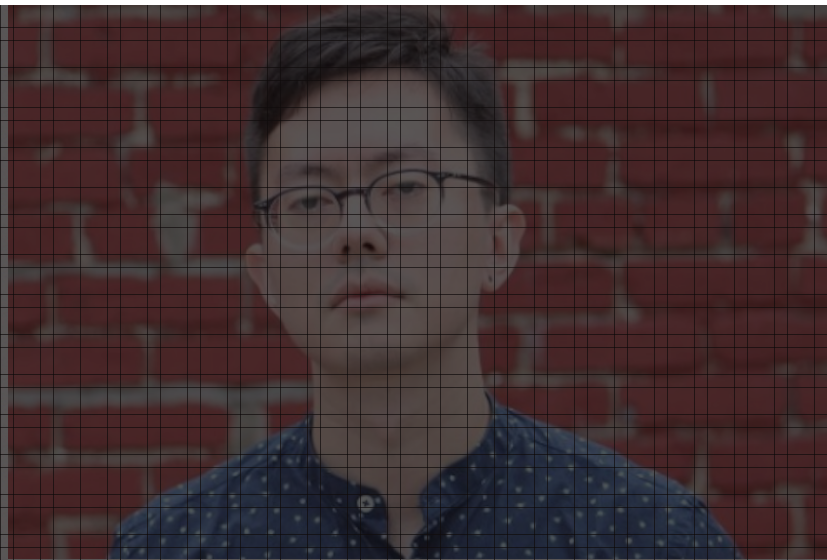
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Daniel Chapman – Photo: AQUA DC.

Several LGBTQ allies weighed in to express their support for NAWAPF's call to action.

"We agree wholeheartedly with all the points raised in the NAWAPF petition," Daniel Chapman, the chair of the D.C.-area LGBTQ Asian organization AQUA DC, told Metro Weekly in an interview.

"Personally, I have not experienced any harassment," Chapman noted. "But I have talked to other [Asian and Pacific Islander] leaders who have been the subject of actual physical acts of violence. It's obviously very painful to see.

"It's also very obvious to us, at least, that a lot of the violence we're seeing manifest right now is the result of political rhetoric," he added. "So we really need to call on political leaders to lessen or completely end this style of racist rhetoric, because it's clearly aimed at creating divisions between the API community and everyone else. We've seen before, with how Muslims were treated right after 9/11, and before and during the run-up to the Iraq War, this kind of rhetoric doesn't end well for anyone involved."

Chapman said he expects there to be some lingering prejudice against Asian Americans, even after the current pandemic subsides. He also worries that Asian-owned businesses, particularly restaurants, may be negatively impacted economically in the future if people continue to buy into falsehoods about Asian Americans serving as vectors for COVID-19.

"I think it's really important that the API community tries to get support from other racial minority groups, because I think that what is happening right now is kind of a longstanding effort to further create divisions that may have existed in the past that are further heightened right now," he said, referring to longstanding tensions between African-Americans and Asian Americans in the District that have risen to the surface in the past, as **once voiced by the now-deceased former Mayor and Ward 8 Councilmember Marion Barry**. "Initially, these kinds of outreach efforts are difficult, but they need to happen."

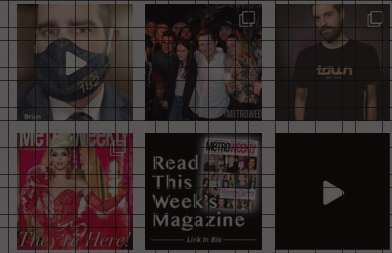
A request seeking comment from Bowser's office was not returned as of press time.

The Human Rights Campaign issued a statement standing in solidarity with the Asian-American community.

"LGBTQ Asian and Pacific Islanders are facing a two-front battle in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We know LGBTQ people are more vulnerable to the health risks of COVID-19 and often more likely to work jobs in highly-affected industries — with data showing that one in five LGBTQ people currently live in poverty. LGBTQ people who are also Asian and Pacific Islander are now confronting a surge in COVID-19 motivated racism and harassment," said HRC Press Secretary Viet Tran.

"Hate has no place in our country and Trump's racist and divisive language only continues to place the Asian and Pacific Islander community — especially immigrants

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— at risk of violence and discrimination,” Tran continued. “As many of us are fighting to protect ourselves and our loved ones from COVID-19, we must continue to stand up against the hate and violence against the Asian and Pacific Islander community.”

The National Center for Transgender Equality denounced any scapegoating of Asian Americans during the pandemic.

“The virus doesn’t care about your gender, race, faith, nationality, or immigration status,” Harper Jean Tobin, the director of policy for NCTE said in an email to *Metro Weekly*. “But inequality and discrimination make immigrants, communities of color, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ people more vulnerable to exposure, illness, scapegoating, and being left out of emergency relief. In this pandemic, these inequalities ultimately endanger us all.”

In a follow-up interview, Tobin urged the mayor to heed the call for the government to provide additional relief for communities affected by the spread of COVID-19.

“We still need more action to support workers who have been excluded from federal relief because of anti-immigrant sentiment. We still need to address the spread of the virus in D.C. Jail. There are many things we need the mayor and the Council to take action on,” Tobin said. “NCTE and many other LGBTQ advocates, as well as advocates from other communities disproportionately affected by this crisis, are going to keep engaging with the D.C. government and the federal government to see the action we need on all fronts of this crisis, including the bias and discrimination that we’re seeing directed against the Asian American community.”

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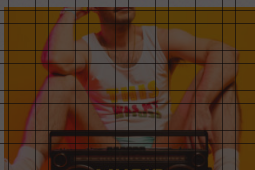
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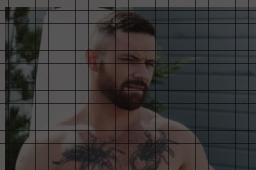
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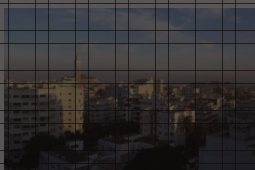
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