

WILLIAM PEDUTO
MAYOR



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CITY OF PITTSBURGH
COMMISSION ON HUMAN RELATIONS
CITY-COUNTY BUILDING

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Pittsburgh (PA) – As numerous news outlets have been reporting, discrimination against people of Asian descent around the world and in the United States, has been increasing. This rise in discrimination is based on unfounded, untrue, and irrational fear and misinformation surrounding the novel coronavirus. Incidents of such unlawful and inexcusable discrimination include increases in the following: anti-Asian rhetoric, such as calling the novel coronavirus the “Chinese virus;” anti-Chinese social media posts; denial of services; avoiding Asian-owned business; making fraudulent claims to keep people away from Asian-owned business; harassment; vandalism; and physical assaults. More specific examples of hateful acts include a sixteen-year-old Asian American boy in California being physically attacked and a Chinese American woman in New York being screamed at and spit on.¹ Sadly, while such racism and xenophobia are being fed by new, false beliefs, such racism and xenophobia are not new. However, regardless of whether or not they are new, they are not acceptable or tolerable.

Across the U.S., to help stop the spread of fear and hate, various organizations and government officials

¹ Morgan Gstalter, *New York AG Launches Hotline to Report Coronavirus Hate Crimes, Xenophobia Against Asian Americans*, The Hill, March 25, 2020, <https://thehill.com/homenews/state-watch/489474-new-york-attorney-general-launches-hotline-to-report-coronavirus-hate>. Lauren Aratani, *‘Coughing while Asia’: Living in Fear as Racism Feeds off Coronavirus Panic*, The Guardian, March 24, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/24/coronavirus-us-asian-americans-racism>. Sabrina Tavernise and Richard A. Oppel, Jr., *Spit On, Yelled At, Attacked: Chinese-Americans Fear for Their Safety*, The New York Times, March 23, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/23/us/chinese-coronavirus-racist-attacks.html>.

are standing up against anti-Asian racism and xenophobia. On February 26, 2020, the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (“CAPAC”), their chairperson, U.S. Representative Judy Chu, and approximately twenty-two other U.S. Representatives sent a letter to other members of Congress that encouraged them to stop inciting fear and racism through misinformation and encouraged them to start sharing only accurate information released by credible health agencies and organizations.² In a letter dated March 11, 2020 to the Democratic and Republican leaders of the U.S. House of Representatives, the National Council of Asian Pacific Americans (“NCAPA”) and approximately 260 signatory organizations urged Congress to take swift, meaningful action to counter and denounce coronavirus-related “hysteria,” “racism, xenophobia, and misinformation.”³ Additionally, on March 23, 2020, New York Attorney General Letitia James “announced the launch of a hotline for New Yorkers to report hate crimes and bias-based incidents.” Attorney General James’ Office is also helping to address anti-Asian discrimination by “connecting victims and impacted communities to available resources, launching civil investigations, and supporting local law enforcement, among other steps.”⁴

The Pittsburgh Commission on Human Relations (“PghCHR”) exists to ensure that members of the Pittsburgh community are treated fairly, equitably, and equally. That includes ensuring that people do not have to live in fear of discrimination. PghCHR stands with our racial social justice partners across the U.S. and the Pittsburgh community to denounce all acts of hate and discrimination, including the recent acts of hate and discrimination against Asian persons. We also stand here to assure the Pittsburgh community that despite the workplace impacts of the novel coronavirus, the PghCHR remains open for business and committed to combatting hate and discrimination.

As the City’s civil rights law enforcement agency, the PghCHR investigates and resolves complaints of discrimination in employment, public accommodations (such as businesses open to the public), and housing (such as renting or buying), based on the following protected classes: race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, place of birth, handicap, or disability. Employment protections also cover age (forty years-old or older), pregnancy (including the partner of a pregnant person), and childbirth or related medical conditions and events. Housing protections also include familial status and the actual or perceived status as a victim of domestic violence.

In addition to investigating complaints, for people who choose to do so voluntarily, the PghCHR can help them report suspected hate crimes and human trafficking to the Pittsburgh office of the Federal

² *As Coronavirus Fears Incite Violence, CAPAC Members Urge Colleagues to Not Stoke Xenophobia*, Press Release, February 26, 2020, <https://chu.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/coronavirus-fears-incite-violence-capac-members-urge-colleagues-not>.

³ NCAPA, *Letter to Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi and Republican Leader of the House Kevin McCarthy*, March 11, 2020, https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/ncapa/pages/89/attachments/original/1583935643/NCAPA_Letter_to_House_Leadership.pdf?1583935643.

⁴ *AG James Launches Hotline to Combat Coronavirus Hate Crimes and Xenophobic Rhetoric*, Press Release, March 23, 2020, <https://ag.ny.gov/press-release/2020/ag-james-launches-hotline-combat-coronavirus-hate-crimes-and-xenophobic-rhetoric>.

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Bureau of Investigation (“FBI”). Please note that the PghCHR and FBI do not report people to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (“ICE”).

If you or someone you know has experienced discrimination while in the City of Pittsburgh within the past year and wants to file a complaint, you can contact the PghCHR by phone at 412-360-9553 and 412-436-9619, and online at <https://pittsburghpa.gov/chr/chr-forms>.