

Legislation Text

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Condemning any and all racist and xenophobic rhetoric against Asian and Asian American communities amid the rise of COVID-19, and expressing appreciation for the resilience, support, and contributions of the City of Philadelphia's Asian American and Chinese American communities.

WHEREAS, Anti-Asian xenophobia has continuously emerged over the course of United States history. From the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act - the first immigration law to restrict an entire ethnic group - to the World War II internment of Japanese-Americans, racist rhetoric and overtly discriminatory public health and immigration policies, rooted in racial anxieties and animosity, have consistently been weaponized against Asian immigrants; and

WHEREAS, There is also a long history of economic exclusion and even quarantine directed at Asian communities in times of crisis. Public health officials in the 19th century characterized Asian immigrants as carriers of fatal diseases like smallpox to justify discriminatory and demeaning policies rooted in racial and economic anxieties. Between 1910 and 1940, over 250,000 Chinese and Japanese immigrants were detained for as long as six months at Angel Island Immigration Station, where, without any indication of illness, they were given invasive medical examinations; and

WHEREAS, The conflation of discriminatory attitudes and the discussion of disease in the public sphere has worked to reinforce anti-Asian sentiment. Flu pandemics in the 1950s and 1960s were coined the "Asian flu" and "Hong Kong flu," yet the spread of H1N1 flu, which first emerged in the United States was not labelled the "American flu," but rather the "swine flu"; and

WHEREAS, For weeks, political figures, media outlets, and individuals on social media have purposefully vilified China and, by extension, people of Asian descent in assigning blame for COVID-19 - an association that has revealed anti-Asian resentment and resulted in an uptick in racial hatred; and

WHEREAS, President Trump and his administration have racialized the COVID-19 pandemic in order to deflect from his handling of a crisis he once deemed a "hoax." On March 7, 2020, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo used the term "Chinese coronavirus" in a televised interview, triggering multiple members of Congress to begin using the term. On March 16, 2020, when the United States was recording tens of thousands of cases of rapidly-spreading infection, President Trump used the term "Chinese virus" at a political rally. The next day, CBS News White House correspondent Weijia Jiang reported that a White House official had "referred to Coronavirus as the 'Kung-Flu' to my face"; and

WHEREAS, The World Health Organization (WHO) has condemned the use of the term "Chinese virus," and has issued a public warning against such terminology, linking it to xenophobic behavior and racial profiling;

and

WHEREAS, According to Professor Russell Cheung of the University of San Francisco, there was a 50 percent rise <<https://tinyurl.com/s4prwnj>> in the number of news articles related to the coronavirus and anti-Asian discrimination between February and March 2020. The online reporting forum Stop AAPI Hate has received over 1,700 reports of incidents of racial harassment and discrimination directed at Asian individuals and businesses since its inception on March 18, 2020. This reporting merely scratches the surface of the substantial vitriol that Asian American communities have faced; and

WHEREAS, Asian Americans have reported an onslaught of xenophobic remarks and hate crimes from around the country from a 16-year old student in San Fernando, CA who was attacked at school to NYC subway riders who have been verbally and physically harassed and assaulted. Asian Americans have consistently expressed concerns about being treated as threats or targets, and not as people; and

WHEREAS, The City of Philadelphia has not been without anti-Asian economic and social exclusion over the course of the COVID-19 crisis. Before COVID-19 had any known cases in Pennsylvania or Philadelphia, local Asian-owned businesses were the first to report significant losses in revenue, raising concerns about discrimination and scapegoating. Mayor Kenney and City officials stood in solidarity with Chinatown businesses and have voiced support for the City's Asian American community and condemned all racial scapegoating; and

WHEREAS, On March 26, 2020, Asian American and immigrant communities across the City held a virtual town hall with hundreds of participants who bravely shared stories of alienation, discrimination, and harassment they have faced in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis; and

WHEREAS, Asian Americans account for eight percent of Philadelphia's population, and the vibrancy of Philadelphia's Asian community cannot be overstated. The Asian American business, civic, art, faith, advocacy, and youth community have repopulated public schools and neighborhoods, revitalized commercial corridors, and brought cultural vitality and civic energy to our City. Members of the Chinese American community have raised hundreds of thousands of dollars in contributions of Personal Protective Equipment and charitable efforts for first responders and essential workers in the wake of this crisis; and

WHEREAS, As reports of xenophobia and racism increase, we as the City of Philadelphia join with our communities to decry any act of hate. We both recognize and celebrate the importance and vibrancy of our Asian immigrant and Asian American communities. We stand by our Asian and Asian American neighbors; we express our appreciation and support of Asian businesses, nonprofits and workers; and we will show the nation why we are the City of Brotherly of Love and Sisterly Affection; and

WHEREAS, In the words of social activist and feminist thinker Grace Lee Boggs, "You cannot change any society unless you take responsibility for it, unless you see yourself as belonging to it and responsible for changing it." In these challenging times, each of us must unequivocally stand against xenophobia and discrimination directed towards anyone and we come together to support Philadelphia's Asian, Asian American and immigrant community economic revitalization and healing; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Condemns any and all racist and xenophobic rhetoric against Asian and Asian American communities amid the rise of COVID-19, and expresses appreciation for the resilience, support and contributions of the City of Philadelphia's Asian American and

Chinese American communities.