

Dear Governor Scott, Senator Leahy, Senator Sanders, Congressman Welch, Mayors, Friends, Colleagues:

Members of our Asian American community are dying. In Atlanta, a white man walked into three spas and murdered eight people. The victims were ambitious business owners, dedicated and hard-working mothers, newlyweds and best friends remembered for being shy and unfailingly loving. Their names are:

Hyun Jung Grant  
Soon C. Park  
Suncha Kim  
Daoyou Feng  
Yong A. Yue  
Delaina Ashley Yaun  
Paul Andre Michels  
Xiaojie Tan.

Since the beginning of this global pandemic that has ravaged our nation and disproportionately targeted the BIPOC community, fear has turned into hostility, hate, violence, and murder. The killing of these eight people come on the heels of the stabbing of an Asian family in Texas that included their two and six-year-old: the consecutive murders of three elderly Asian American men, 75, 84, and 91 years old, in broad daylight. This also includes the recent unprovoked assault on 75-year-old Xiao Zhen Xie who beat her attacker in the streets in self-defense but, despite successfully defending herself, is so traumatized by the randomness of the assault she is now afraid to leave her home. We have had to call our siblings, parents and grandparents and tell them to stay home, stay quiet, stay alive.

Did you know that since the pandemic, there have been 3,795 bias incidents reported in the U.S., representing hundred-fold rises in violent incidents against Asian Americans? In the last twenty years, Asians have been the fastest growing targets of hate crimes. **Discriminatory acts are also happening here in Vermont.** We are being accosted in local stores, hearing racial epithets hurled at our children at sporting events, being targeted in the lobbies and private offices of hospitals and clinics, being told to go back to our country. It is incumbent upon you to protect us.

There is an illusion that as Asian Americans, we do not experience discrimination, that we have never lived in poverty or been the subject of violence or police profiling. We are a community made up of different cultures, languages, countries of origin, and different generations of Americans, but to many of you, we are the same: “Chinese,” “foreigner,” “un-American,” “New-American,” “Non-English speaking.” Our names immediately oust us in our applications for housing and employment. In Vermont, Asian American women make only 67 cents on the dollar earned by white men, amounting to a lifetime loss of more than \$700,000. That loss has had an impact on our ability to invest, purchase land, choose the right schools for our children and plan for their futures. Most of these disparities go largely ignored. We are invisible although we are here. We have been here.

Our present-day experiences are not different from the historical experiences of our ancestors in this country. It has just taken on a different form. Then, it was the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882; today, it is the mass deportation of South East Asians, many of whom arrived here lawfully as refugees in the 1970s and 1980s. Then, we were denied the right to purchase land, to citizenship, to testify in court; today, we are denied admissions into schools, leadership positions and equal pay. Then, irrational fear and racism from WWII justified Japanese Internment Camps; today, irrational fear and racism from COVID-19 justify violence against our community. Then, white Southerners replaced slave labor with Chinese laborers, pitting the Black and Asian communities against one another; today, our communities fight for “scarce” resources and “limited” positions that are actually limitless for the majority. Again, we see members of our communities committing atrocities against one another.

In the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd, we strategically gathered to work towards ending this division and fight for our shared liberation. To this end, we created an affinity group called APIDA for Black Lives. We meet monthly to plan events and educate ourselves. This week, our conversation turned inwards. It was reflective and pained by silence: moments of silence for the deceased, the silence of our political leaders, friends and colleagues, the silence created when there is an absence of action after a promise or tweet. We breathed in that undisturbed air and let it quiet our brown and golden bodies temporarily. But that silence has since turned into anger.

If we are ever going to be free, we must dismantle white supremacy and all of the false narratives that come with it: that racism is a binary issue; that the existing laws that prohibit discrimination are adequate to address historical trauma and hundreds of years of discriminatory governmental actions; that discipline, policing and curriculum in our schools are objectively applied and delivered; and that white neutrality exists. Perhaps this last narrative by which the white person believes the absence of personal experience qualifies them to operate from the center of the line, is most dangerous because they are in fact, operating from the end. It is much easier for a BIPOC person to draw from personal experience and also easier for other BIPOC around them to call them in or out if those experiences are clouding their judgment. For the white person, the lack of experience with racial discrimination makes them unaware and unaccountable to themselves and to others. They must work that much harder to unlearn, to overcome, and ultimately to exercise judgment without regards to race and color. Yet “white-as-neutral” permeates every structure and system.

This might explain why the working interpretation of Atlanta police was that race was not the motive in the murder of eight people, most of whom were Asian and were working in spas that were owned and/or frequented by Asians. Their only basis for that contention is that the white man they arrested, completely unscathed, said he was not a racist. The benefit of the doubt and credibility we bestow on the white suspect and the ease by which we erase the identifies of the victims and ignore the larger context of these crimes is alarming.

While we are speaking up for Asian Americans now, we also stand with other communities of color. Until the playing field is level for all, humanity is held back from its full potential.

We call upon you, Governor Scott, Senator Leahy, Senator Sanders, Congressman Welch, Mayors, our friends, and colleagues to not ignore what has been happening and to take the following actions:

1. Publicly denounce the attacks, hate crimes and murders against the Asian American community and promise that similar attacks here in Vermont will be prosecuted to the fullest extent possible.
2. When the victim of crime is a person of color, assume from the start that it is a hate crime until a full and thorough investigation proves otherwise. Ensure that every investigation at the law enforcement and prosecutorial level is reviewed and guided by a person of color.
3. Immediately issue an Executive Order that calls upon every Agency, Department, University, Employer to study and address equitable representation and equal pay on their boards, commissions, and positions of leadership.
4. Publicly support the following bills:
  - a. H.387, an act relating to establishing the Task Force to Study and Develop Reparations for the Institution of Chattel Slavery.
  - b. H.245, an act relating to increasing the membership of and providing funding to the Vermont Ethnic and Social Equity Standards Advisory Working Group.
  - c. H.428, an act relating to hate-motivated crimes and misconduct.
  - d. H.320, an act relating to prohibiting agreements that prevent an employee from working for the employer following a settlement of a discrimination claim.
  - e. H.329, an act amending the prohibitions against discrimination
  - f. H.210, an act relating to addressing disparities and promoting equity in the health care system.

In the fight towards shared liberation, we must remain steadfast even when we are tired, especially when we are tired. Perhaps it is then that we are drawing close.

Signed,

Members of the VT APIDA for Black Lives Group