

Testimony by Miriam Yeung
Executive Director, National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF)
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Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you today.

I am Executive Director of the National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF for short), the country's only national organization building a movement for social justice and human rights for Asian American and Pacific Islander women and girls in the United States. With chapters in 15 cities, including the great city of Phoenix Arizona. NAPAWF works to make sure our communities are seen, heard and included. I am also the co-chair of the We Belong Together campaign which brings women of all stripes to the fight for commonsense immigration policy reform.

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are the fastest growing racial group in the country and today we number 21.8 million. We also know that 75% of immigrants to this country are women and children. All this to say that, despite the stereotype of who an immigrant is and the long shadow cast by the first immigration law passed in our country – the Page Act of 1875– which as you know prohibited the entry of Asian women to the US by labelling all of us as “prostitutes”, - despite all this - you are looking at the new face of America - one that is increasingly Asian and increasingly woman. I myself came with my family from Hong Kong in 1977.

AAPI women are the backbones of civic participation and engagement in our families. Polling from New American Media shows that women, and mothers specifically, are the engines within families who drive the citizenship process, health care decision making, and voting likelihood. In the past decade we've doubled the number of AAPI voters to about 4 million in 2012. We add an average of 620,000 new voters every election cycle.

Yet the full civic participation potential of our community remains under-developed for three key reasons. The first two are prevailing stereotypes about our communities that render us invisible. First, the model minority myth, which portrays all AAPIs as healthy, well-off and successful, has the triple effect of erasing the long history of systematic exclusion and discrimination against Asians in America; erasing the range of experiences amongst the more than 50 different ethnic groups which make up the AAPI community; and sets Asian Americans as a wedge against other communities of color, particularly African American communities.

The second prevailing stereotype of AAPIs is that of being the perpetual foreigner – the false notion that we are the racial minorities in the country that can't and won't fully assimilate. I want

to acknowledge that this effect is particularly felt by our Muslim brothers and sisters today and leads to huge disparities around surveillance, policing, detention, and deportation.

Thirdly, we need politicians to specifically speak to us – quite literally. Two-thirds of AAPI women surveyed in post-election polls report that they received no contact prior to the election. And 51% of AAPI women agreed with the statement that “public officials and politicians don’t care much what people like me think.” That is why we need data disaggregation, outreach and language access. We need a platform that reflects our hopes and dreams and that specifically name Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander women. In 2016, we demand to be seen, heard and included – not just implied.

- We support an active government which provides more services. When asked about budget priorities, support more for education, health care, seniors and the safety net for the poor. We are less likely to support increasing the budget for the military. We support tax increases on high earners to reduce the federal deficit.
- AAPI women know that reproductive justice is central to our self-worth, self-determination and success. 78% of us support a legal right to abortion and 63% of AAPI millennials support Medicaid funding for abortion. We resist racist laws which seek to undermine our reproductive freedom such as sex and race selective abortion bans – a law which we are suing the state of Arizona over along with the NAACP.
- 80% of AAPIs support stronger gun restrictions.
- We support pay equity. While in aggregate AAPI women are paid only 86 cents for every dollar a white man is paid, when you look more closely in our community, we find, for example, that Vietnamese American women are paid only 61 cents on that dollar, and Burmese American women 53 cents, and Bhutanese American women only 38 cents. One third of AAPI women workers make less than \$15/hour. And AAPI women are concentrated in low-wage jobs which do not always provide sick days or paid family leave.
- The vast majority of AAPI women us consider ourselves environmentalists and we support strong environmental protections.
- Education is a serious concern for our community with affordability of college, quality of schools and bullying in schools most highly ranked as “very serious” concerns for themselves and their families. I also want to lift up that 70% of AAPI women support affirmative action.
- We support a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants and family reunification as priorities. Visa backlogs take decades to process, and 40% of those waiting to be reunited with their families are from Asian countries. Those are our families we are separated from.

In summary, we know that AAPIs are quite progressive. Engaging and organizing our community is critical to securing equity and justice for all Americans so please see us, talk to us, say our names, try to pronounce our names correctly, and include us in the platform. Thank you.