

Testimony by Christopher Kang
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to Democratic National Convention Platform Drafting Committee

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Thank you Chairman Cummings and to the entire Platform Drafting Committee for this opportunity to speak to you today.

I am National Director of the National Council of Asian Pacific Americans, a non-profit coalition of 35 national Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander organizations and a project of the Tides Center.

Our recommendations today have one overarching principle, and that is one of inclusion. As we strive for justice and equality, we demand respect for all Americans. We believe in a government that values diversity. That recognizes that our differences are a source of strength, not a wedge for division.

Last December, we declared that standing against anti-Muslim hate, xenophobia, and bigotry would be one of our top priorities. We must do more than oppose hateful rhetoric, but also oppose the actions that these words lead to:

- By providing resources for students who are being bullied, as well as their parents, teachers, and administrators;
- By addressing hate crimes; and
- By ensuring that no one is profiled because of their race, national origin, or religion.

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are the fastest growing racial group in the country, at 21.8 million Americans. We demand to be seen, to be heard, and to have a seat at the table.

With respect to being seen, the Census is a core civil rights issue for our community. If we are not counted, then we don't count.

The Census must be adequately funded to reach all communities, including AAPI—in language, where possible—and to collect, analyze, and report as much disaggregated data as possible.

Disaggregated data is a high priority for us throughout government. Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders represent nearly 50 ethnicities, and our priorities, needs, and concerns are not always the same. Far too often, data is not collected or reported for AAPIs at all, and only rarely is it disaggregated by ethnicity.

We need this data to be the foundation for public policy, to ensure that the right programs are reaching the right communities.

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders also demand to be heard.

For the one-third of AAPIs who are Limited English Proficient, this means greater access to resources that are in-language and culturally competent. I challenge this Committee to lead by example and to translate your platform into as many AAPI languages as possible.

AAPIs need to be heard most when we exercise our constitutional right and responsibility to vote, which is why we so strongly support the restoration of the Voting Rights Act.

Finally, we demand a seat at the table. That means not only the opportunity to sit here, as witnesses, where we can share our expertise, our stories, and our perspectives. That also means seats on the other side of the table—from entry-level political appointments to Cabinet Secretaries and federal judges, our government is stronger when it reflects the diversity of our nation.

And the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders must not only be renewed, it must be bolstered with a larger budget and more permanent staff.

These themes—of being seen, being heard, and having a seat at the table—go far beyond the issues I've outlined, and I urge this Committee to ask the following questions in every issue it considers: Are Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders being seen? Are they being heard?

Now, what does this mean?

In immigration, it means not only pushing for comprehensive immigration reform, but also making family reunification a central part of that effort. Visa backlogs take decades to process, and 40% of those waiting to be reunited with their families are from Asian countries.

It means ensuring that immigration enforcement does not profile on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

And as we consider immigration, we also must not forget our indigenous people and continue to support the federal recognition of Native Hawaiians.

In health care, seeing and hearing AAPIs means not only defending the Affordable Care Act, but improving language access and enforcing the civil rights protections in the recent Section 1557 regulations.

In reproductive justice, it means not only supporting a woman's right to choose a safe and legal abortion, but also raising awareness of sex-selective abortion bans based on racial stereotypes and the targeted prosecutions of women of color.

In pay equity, it is recognizing not only that AAPI women are paid only 86 cents for every dollar a white man is paid, but that, for example, Vietnamese American women are paid only 61 cents on that dollar, and Burmese American women 53 cents, and Bhutanese American women only 38 cents.

Finally, seeing and hearing AAPIs means seeing beyond the stereotypes—and in particular the model minority myth.

- It is seeing that Pacific Islanders have among the highest unemployment rates of all racial and ethnic groups and that many AAPI subgroups continue to lack access to higher education.
- It is seeing that AAPIs are the least likely to seek mental health treatment.
- It is seeing that more than 1 in 10 undocumented immigrants are from Asian countries.
- It is seeing that AAPIs have an additional equity in criminal justice reform, as the pipeline from school to prison extends for many AAPIs to deportation.

As you draft your platform, I hope that it will reflect our overarching principle of inclusion—by including AAPIs in every aspect and every issue within it.

Thank you again for this opportunity—to be seen, to be heard, and to have this seat at the table.