



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts Asian American Commission

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Executive Director

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One Ashburton Place

12th Floor

Boston, MA 02108

www.aacommission.org

Meeting Minutes

June 29, 2020, 6:30pm – 8:00pm

Meeting will be held via teleconference in compliance with the Governor's Executive Order on the Open Meeting Law and COVID-19

Meeting called to order at 6:40pm

Staff Present Remotely: Jenny Chiang, Jay Wong, Sheila Vo

1. Open Discussion on Black Lives Matter

- Mary L. states there was confusion in calling for votes for the statement and supported having an emergency meeting to discuss. The statement was issued in a rush and emails were sent short notice.
- Vira asks who signed onto a statement to the press that dissented to the statement. Mary L. clarifies that the Boston Globe cited folks dissenting as private citizens, not as Commissioners.
- Staff have started a calendar of events and milestones. Danielle agrees with Mary L. that we need to have a rapid response protocol.
- Meena states it was important to speak up with black lives matter. We had previously released a statement where the Commission held a meeting to wordsmith but believes it may not be the most efficient method. We should feel comfortable with the EC as the spokespeople of the entire Commission. Meena states that statements should be on behalf of the Commission and it should not divide who voted and who didn't vote. Meena had questions about the black lives matter statement, but was confident that the statement was carefully crafted. The backlash did take away from the central work of supporting black communities.
- Betty states that everything should be fair, transparent, and done with deliberation. What statute, rules, regulations relate to a rapid response? The statement intended to address racism but revealed underlying racial bias and excludes South Asians and Southeast Asians. In the Vincent Chin vigil, a Filipino leader stated, "I don't have white privilege and I'm not anti-black." It created false, negative stereotypes of Asian Americans as anti-black and putting them in harms way of dangerous racist and mindless people. It is not our role to preach to our communities what they need.
- Haniya states that she recommended to include dalit panthers. There has been a huge solidarity movement among dalit youth. The goal of the statement was to show solidarity between the Asian and Black community. There are ways in which the black community and activists have inspired other communities nationally and internationally.
- Gilbert feels there was no need to rush and his comments were ignored
- Vira states that the comments using language of all lives matter is offensive to the black lives matter movement. Vira recognizes that we



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were not able to have conversation and regrets that a space was not offered.

- Pralhad agrees with Gilbert. The AAC was not rushed like this before. Everyone's opinion needs to be included. The whole community is divided. The Indian community is angry about the statement. The statement was put out without everyone's opinion. We are giving a bad name to our appointing authorities.
- Mabel states that the Commission as a whole did not comment to media other than saying we stand by our statement. Danielle, as our Communications Chair brought up the need for a statement. Vira acknowledged that in hindsight, we could have done better. It was done in an email so not everyone had opportunity for feedback. If we had an emergency meeting, the outcome may have been the same due to the democratic process. We should discuss how to do better next time. Bringing up the name black panthers does not incite any power. We all have our own bias and prejudices, but we have to be open and listen, especially to the younger generation.
- Philjay feels that is nothing wrong with calling out anti-blackness and acknowledging our own flaws. It is an injustice to sweep this under the rug. Some communities have benefited from white privilege, but it doesn't discredit anyone's experience. There are people in the Filipino community who discredit those in the black community.
- Meena thanks Haniya for explaining the thought process behind including dalit panthers. We first need to have a conversation in our community to listen to one another. What is more important is the action that follows. What we see here is a different paradigm.
- Sam states that the black community by large and many in the Asian community have expressed support with our statement. In 1982, if those in the black community did not stand beside us, Vincent Chin would not have been recognized.
- Mary C. states she is very pleased with the dialogue here. It should have been done before the statement and hopes we can continue this in the future. The way to avoid conflict is to make sure there is a process. Mary C. suggests a full consensus vote to approve statements.
- Betty suggests that claiming we have proximity to white privilege is harmful to funding nonprofits serving the Asian American community. She shares that Commissioners are not treated equitably in the discussion.
- Former Commissioner Joseph Wong states that back then the Commission did not have funding and did not have guidelines in place. The Commission had no power to censure or ask others to step down. Regarding the statement, sometimes it's better to ask for forgiveness than ask for permission. The AAC can only work if there is consensus among all Commissioners. The Commission has to speak in one voice. The ones who might have proximity to white privilege are the Commissioners.



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Betty moves to adjourn the meeting at 8:10pm and table the second agenda item.

Mary C. seconds.

Vote

- Yes: Mary C., Pralhad, Betty, Mary L.
- No: Mabel, Philjay, Gilbert, Sam, Danielle, Nate, Haniya, Vira, Bora

Motion does not pass

2. Discussion on Communications Strategy & Rapid Response Protocol

- Danielle states that the calendar of events will help inform us with upcoming events that may need us to have a public statement. This is a space for all to contribute to building a communications strategy.
- Betty would like to find out what rules and regulations or statutes applies to our ability to make statements.
- Philjay states that this is to have a discussion to create a policy since we do not currently have one.
- Betty states that our previous statements should be null and void since they did not follow a procedure. Sam asks if Betty is suggesting if all past Commission statements should be null and void.
- Bora states that not everything will be in our bylaws or statute. There is nothing wrong with creating a policy on this.
- Danielle reads a line from the statute forwarded by Nate, “according to MA GL Chapter 3, Section 68 (2) inform the public and leaders of business, education, human services, health care, state and local governments and the communications media of the unique cultural, social, ethnic, economic and educational issues affecting Asian Americans in the commonwealth;” I interpret that as allowing the AAC to make statements to the public and it’s within the purview of the Commission to issue public statements as needed.
- AAC has issued statements in the past that took three months to release. The way we have always done it is someone brings an issue to the executive committee, EC discusses it, Communications Chair drafts it, EC comes back to look at the statement, no one wants to do wordsmithing because it takes too much time. EC looks through it and brings it the full commission to go through the content. That’s how it’s always been done and other boards do it. The issue is how fast can we get it (statement) out since we only meet once a month.
- Gilbert agrees that sometimes we need to put out rapid statements. He states that the votes should be identified for statements to make it clear to the public. Going forward, we should have special meetings for any matter.
- Sam agrees that we need to have open dialogue and equal voice. Sam disagrees that we need to have unanimous consent, as long as we have majority support from the Commission. If we needed unanimous consent, we would very rarely come to an agreement and we would not be active. We have an obligation to make difficult stances even if it is controversial as long as it is right and has majority support within the Commission.



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- Vira agrees that we should all have an opportunity to discuss. We should elect officers that we have faith in and empower them to make decisions. Vira feels it is disingenuous when there are Commissioners behind the scene to work against the Commission.
- Betty asks if AAC has the authority to make position statements. Betty states that G.L.C. 3 section 8 states that the Commission cannot do so without the permission of appointing authorities. AAC has no procedure to issue statements without approval of their appointing authority. Are we going to various appointing authorities to ask them about the position statements we are making?
- Philjay suggests a 2/3 vote for approval since a unanimous vote may not always be possible.
- Sam recommends firming up in language in event of state of emergency. Releasing statements too late may be ineffective.
- Vira shares that the Commission on the Status of Women also puts out position statements.
- Danielle shares hesitation against a 2/3 vote since it does not align with our bylaws of simple majority. Changing to 2/3 majority vote would need a vote on bylaw changes. Perhaps we should provide a 72-hour notice.
- Mabel recommends to not use email for discussion since it causes confusion. Mabel agrees that we should keep simple majority approval.
- Gilbert agrees to keep out email discussion, but to at least hold a meeting.
- Vira shares that there are spaces where she does not feel represented. If the Commission put out a statement that went against her values, she would consider resigning.
- Sam shares that changing it to a 2/3 vote has to be clear that it's 2/3 of those that actually vote and are present, since there are some that abstain or cannot be present.
- Gilbert shares that we need to remind Commissioners of the attendance requirement.

3. Meeting Adjourned

- Sam motions to adjourn at 9:01pm. Mabel seconds.

Vote

- Yes: Vira, Danielle, Sam, Bora, Gilbert, Mabel, Philjay, Nate
- No: None heard

Motion passes