



# The Commonwealth of Massachusetts Asian American Commission

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## AAC Special Meeting to Discuss Statement Condemning Recent Incidents of Anti-Asian Racism and Continuing Violence towards AAPI Community

### Meeting Minutes

July 28, 2021, 6:30 pm to 8:00 pm

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89145252909>

\*Please note this meeting will be recorded

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

Present Commissioners are marked with a \*. Absent Commissioners are highlighted.

Commissioners present: Chair Sam Hyun, Commissioner Danielle Kim, Commissioner Vira Douangmany Cage, Commissioner Ekta Saksena, Commissioner Pralhad KC, Commissioner Nate Bae Kupel, Commissioner Philjay KC, Commissioner Megha Prasad, Commissioner Cinda Danh, Commissioner Meena Bharath

Staff present: Executive Director Yasmin Padamsee Forbes; Community Engagement Intern, Lily Tang

Members of the public: none

The meeting is recorded.

### Attachments:

- Anti-Asian hate AAPI statement draft

### 1. Call meeting to order

Chair Hyun calls the meeting to order at 6:35 pm. Chair Hyun was recently notified by the commissioner who this statement pertains to would not make tonight's meeting. He mentions that two other Commissioners informed him that they could not attend.

### 2. Anti-Asian hate AAPI statement– VOTE

Chair Hyun notes that the commissioner who experienced the recent attack supports passing the statement with the language. In the spirit of this request, Chair Hyun proposes voting on the statement with no changes. If the motion fails, we can discuss and consider potential edits to the language.

Commissioner Cage states that she prefers that deliberation happen before the AAC votes on the statement for transparency.

Chair Hyun provides the context of the situation, noting that a task force of Commissioners met last Friday to discuss putting together a statement condemning the broader issue of anti-Asian racism and a particular recent event affecting a



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Commissioner. Chair Hyun notes that he presented a draft version of a statement at that meeting, and another task force member also presented a different draft version. The group discussed the two drafts and put forth a revised compromise version that the complete AAC is now considering and discussing today.

Chair Hyun reads the revised draft version out loud for the record.

Commissioner Cage mentions having deep sympathy for any victims of assault. She notes that the statement does not include many details about the particular incident, which could provoke greater fear within the AAPI community. She mentions a police report for this specific incident, and it does not state that this was a biased hate crime. In the paragraph starting with "July 19", she mentions that it calls for prosecution to the fullest extent. She notes that the criminal justice system disproportionately affects Black and Brown communities. She notes that the alleged perpetrator is a Black woman experiencing homelessness. As such, she is uncomfortable with the AAC putting out a statement about this matter.

Chair Hyun notes that he is uncomfortable speaking about an event that pertains to an individual who is not present today.

Commissioner Cage notes that all the information she shared is publicly available. She states that, in her opinion, the case is closed. It is a misdemeanor that will be heard in Boston municipal court.

Chair Hyun cautions against putting out information about an ongoing investigation. Chair notes it is a challenging conversation.

Commissioner Cage states she is unsure why the AAC is discussing a personal issue in this public meeting. However, the AAC needs to share the facts of the incident not to create undue fear in the AAPI community.

Commissioner Kim thanked Commissioner Cage for sharing her perspective and agreed that she shared some hesitancy against language that advocates for harsh criminal penalties for an individual with a long track record of mental health issues. At the same time, she wants to balance that with the anxiety of the commissioner who experienced this shocking and unsettling situation that can make anyone feel unsafe just walking down the street. Personally disapproves of endorsing the statement and will be more comfortable continuing the deliberations and working through some potential language edits to ensure it does not provoke undue fear within the AAPI community. It also needs to take a tempered approach to consider what Commissioner Cage mentioned as the inappropriate impact of the criminal justice system. This is a complex and nuanced conversation, and hard to have this conversation when the commissioner involved is not present. Also, any edits go counter to what the commissioner recommended that she only approves the statement without any further changes. Commissioner Kim would like to see some additional edits to this statement. or conversation about the statement language.



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Chair Hyun notes that it is challenging to proceed without the commissioner considered not part of this meeting.

Commissioner Bae Kupel agrees with feeling conflicted about this matter and not ready to vote on the statement right now, partially because of the uncertainty with the details of the incident. He also mentions that the message is unclear as to whom the call to action is directed; therefore, he is not comfortable voting for a statement of this magnitude. He said he has empathy for the commissioner that experienced this situation as he does for people living with mental illness and without housing. Important to think this through about what the message is and the action or advocacy we are asking. He says he needs to leave the meeting due to another commitment.

Commissioner Bae Kupel drops off the call.

Commissioner Prasad states that the Commission should not be putting forth language about this incident, given the details are still unclear. Of course, she cares deeply that this incident happened to one of our Commissioners and cites that it would be an abuse of power to put the statement out as is.

Commissioner Kim states that there appears to be a consensus among Commissioners in attendance that there is discomfort with proceeding with the statement and having this conversation without the one Commissioner present.

Commissioner Danh is also uncomfortable with the statement and to proceed without the Commissioner present. Recommends that the task force convenes again, drafts a new statement with these discussions in mind, and presents it to the Commission.

Commissioner Prasad said she is happy for the task force to convene again and draft a new statement to bring back to the full Commission. She revisits Commissioner Bae Kupel's comment about the need for a call to action, and she notes that there was a divide amongst task force members about what a call to action and solution should look. Commissioner Prasad proposes waiting to state the legal proceedings about the incident are resolved. Otherwise, there will be continued gridlock among the task force.

Commissioner KC states that it would be helpful for one particular commissioner to share more details about the incident and schedule the next meeting based on that commissioner's availability.

Commissioner Cage comments on potential concern with retriggering the victim of the incident and being thoughtful about the role of this public body in providing support and addressing issues like this. She notes being comfortable with the statement language if the paragraph about the details of the incident were deleted.



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She notes the broader importance of bringing our community together in partnership and being unified in our collective ask for justice and solidarity. She proposes removing the paragraph detailing the incident. As a public body, she doesn't think that the AAC should not be involved in commenting on this individual matter but speak to the broader reforms needed to combat all incidents of violence against communities of color.

Chair Hyun notes the challenge in addressing this broader systemic issue and respecting the wishes of the individual Commissioner with whom this pertains.

Commissioner Bharat asks if it would be possible for the Executive Director and the Chair to reach out to the individual Commissioner and ask how she would feel comfortable proceeding. Chair Hyun notes that both he and Yasmin have been communicating with the individual Commissioner this afternoon. They reinforced that all members of the Commission are empowered to have their own opinion about the statement.

Commissioner Kim commended all commissioners for their nuanced and thoughtful comments. She would love to see more systemic policy reforms as they are needed for real change and to bring justice to the AAPI community and all communities of color. Bring back policy language into the statement.

Chair Hyun mentions that he and Yasmin will speak to the commissioner, inform her about the discussion at this meeting, and ask if she feels comfortable with further discussion to edit the statement. He notes that all of the Commission's actions are done as a public body. He states that the commissioner could put out a personal statement of her own and solicit individual sign-on in support.

Chair Hyun supports striking out the details of the incident; however, that conflicts with the commissioner's wishes.

Commissioner Cage supports Chair Hyun's discretion on the next steps, given his and the ED's conversations with the one commissioner. She believes that the AAC has honored the intent and spirit of the commissioner's request by bringing this matter to the consideration of the whole public body and holding a special meeting today.

Important for Commissioners to know why it happened, so it does not happen to any other person. It is vital to understand the resources available and what is also lacking what policies we can push for besides the criminal justice system.

Chair Hyun thanks Commissioner Cage for her comments and notes for the record that members of the task force felt strongly about approaching recommendations from an intersectional lens and including systemic policy actions, particularly ones that are not linked to the criminal justice system.



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Commissioner Bharat asks Chair Hyun to specify what lines are controversial. He cites the line that the "perpetrator of the hate crime is prosecuted to the fullest extent under the law," and calling on the Civil Rights Department to take action is outside the scope of the AAC. He supports proposing more community-driven recommendations.

Chair Hyun provides further context that there was no consensus among the task force. Three members agreed with one version of the statement, and three other members supported a different version.

Commissioner Prasad said to move this conversation, and Commissioner Bharat second the conversation

Yes: Commissioner Cage, Commissioner Prasad, Commissioner Kim, Commissioner Commissioner Bharath, Commissioner Solar, Chair Hyun

No:

Abstain:

Motion passes unanimously.

### **3. New Business**

### **4. Next Commission Meeting: August 17, 2021**

### **5. Other community updates & meetings adjourned**

Commissioner Kim motions to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Saksena seconds.

YES: Commissioner Vira, Commissioner Prasad, Commissioner Kim,

Commissioner Saksena, Commissioner Bharath, Commissioner Solar, Chair Hyun

NO: none

Abstain: none

Motion passes.

Meeting adjourned at 7:33 pm.