

Bill targets anti-Asian hate crimes tied to COVID-19

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Editor's note: *The House of Representatives passed this measure May 18 by a vote of 364–62 and President Joe Biden signed it into law two days later. [Learn more.](#)*

What's the news: The AMA supports the “COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act” that passed the U.S. Senate on a 94–1 vote and will soon be taken up by the House of Representatives.

“This legislation seeks to address the ongoing hate and violence targeted at Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) by providing greater assistance with law-enforcement response to COVID-19 hate crimes,” AMA Executive Vice President and CEO James L. Madara, MD, wrote in a letter of endorsement shared with the bill’s sponsors, Sen. Mazie Hirono of Hawaii and Rep. Grace Meng of New York City.

Among other provisions, the legislation:

- Designates a specific employee within the U.S. Department of Justice fully dedicated to facilitating expedited reviews of COVID-19 hate crimes ultimately reported to federal, state and local law enforcement.
- Mandates the release of federal guidance for state and local law enforcement agencies to establish online reporting of hate crimes and notices regarding the availability of digital reporting in multiple different languages.
- Requires federal guidance for state and local law enforcement agencies on expanding culturally competent, linguistically appropriate public education campaigns, data collection and public reporting of hate crimes.
- Directs the Departments of Justice and Health and Human Services—in conjunction with the COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force and community-based organizations—to issue guidance on best practices for mitigating racially discriminatory language when describing the current pandemic.

Why it's important: There have been “nearly 3,800 firsthand reports of violence, discrimination, and

harassment against Asian Americans since March of last year, including more than 500 incidents in just the first two months of 2021,” according to data cited in the AMA’s letter.

“This number is likely an underestimate,” Dr. Madara wrote. “The AMA strongly condemns xenophobic and race-based scapegoating and violence against AAPI individuals. Racism and xenophobia—in action and in language—must not be tolerated.”

Learn more: Find out the key role of allies in combating anti-Asian racism during the pandemic in this recent episode of the “AMA COVID-19 Update.”

Since the pandemic’s early days, “the AMA highlighted that xenophobic language around the virus threatened to further fuel discrimination and hate crimes against Asian Americans, which were already a significant concern due to longstanding interpersonal and structural racism,” AMA President Susan R. Bailey, MD, noted in the aftermath of the senseless Atlanta-area killings that took the lives of eight people, six of them women of Asian descent.