



**Chinese-American Planning Council, Inc.
Testimony at the Racial Justice Commission
July 20, 2021**

Thank you to Members of the Racial Justice Commission for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Wayne Ho, and I am the President and CEO of the Chinese-American Planning Council, Inc. (CPC). The mission of CPC is to promote social and economic empowerment of Chinese American, immigrant, and low-income communities. CPC was founded in 1965 as a grassroots, community-based organization in response to the end of the Chinese Exclusion years and the passing of the Immigration Reform Act of 1965. Our services have expanded since our founding to include three key program areas: education, family support, and community and economic empowerment.

CPC is the largest Asian American social service organization in the U.S., providing vital resources to more than 60,000 people per year through more than 50 programs at over 30 sites across Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens. CPC employs over 700 staff whose comprehensive services are linguistically accessible, culturally competent, and highly effective in reaching low-income and immigrant individuals and families. With the firm belief that social service can promote social change, CPC strives to empower our constituents as agents of social justice, with the overarching goal of advancing and transforming communities.

To that end, we are grateful to testify on today's panel on overcoming racial disparities in health and mental health. CPC is basing our recommendations on the social determinants of health, recognizing that the conditions of where New Yorkers live, learn, work, play, and worship affect a wide range of health risks and outcomes. Health care access and quality, education access and quality, social and community connections, economic stability, and neighborhood and built environment are conditions that must be addressed in order to eradicate White supremacy and promote racial justice.

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) are the fastest growing racial group in New York City, nearly doubling in size every decade since 1970 and making up more than 15% of New York City's population. There are more than 1.3 million residents of Asian descent living in New York City, coming from over 40 ethnic groups. For New York's fastest growing racial group, racial justice is data justice, language justice, and budget justice.

1) Data Justice

While more than 1.3 million residents of Asian descent live in New York City, when government agencies collect and issue reports, this diverse population is often not mentioned, or grouped into the generic categories of "Asian", "Other" or even "White." AAPIs are often misrepresented as a homogeneous group, despite the fact that they are an incredibly diverse population, with a wide variety of ethnicities, cultures, religions, and languages. Within the 40+ APA subgroups that exist in New York City, there are unique social, educational, health, and economic differences associated with each ethnicity that are not assessed or addressed properly due to insufficient data disaggregation.

When government agencies report averaged aggregate data under the category of "Asian", they further conceal the diverse experiences and real challenges that distinct AAPI communities face. In 2016, New York City adopted Local Law 126 to mandate that service-providing government agencies designated by the Mayor provide all persons served by the agency with a standardized, voluntary, and anonymous demographic survey to collect information regarding ancestry and language. The City hoped that this data could be used by agencies and the public to better understand the demographic makeup of client

populations and to improve services to residents from different backgrounds and identities. However, there are continued gaps towards this feat. The anonymous demographic survey has not been utilized uniformly across agencies and the response rate towards the form varies inconsistently from agency-to-agency. Due to these inconsistencies, collected data from Local Law 126 has yet to be used by agencies or community based organizations to improve or better target programming and services.

Much of the data collected surrounding COVID-19 has also failed to acknowledge and address the realities of Asian American New Yorkers. Currently upwards of 60% of race data relating to COVID-19 cases and 30% relating to COVID-19 vaccinations is missing in New York City. When it comes to data of those not hospitalized for COVID-19, 64% of racial demographic data is incomplete. While statistics show that APAs are 2x more likely to test positive for COVID-19 than their white counterparts and 53% more likely to die from the virus, these numbers are not being reported or shared by City agencies. Instead, Asian organizations are forced to rely on institutional studies from universities or colleges using independently collected data to learn and assess the needs in their communities.

Ultimately, collecting and using disaggregated data is an essential step toward identifying disparities and addressing inequality amongst the Asian American community. Without disaggregated data, policymakers and researchers have to rely on data in the aggregate as released by various state and local agencies. Said data is not consistent and varies in different jurisdictions. Neglecting to disaggregate data denies Southeast Asian American communities the resources and support they need to thrive. Without disaggregated data, APA groups are made unseen, and their needs are not considered in important policy and programmatic decisions. As a result, they are caught in the vicious cycle of invisibility, marginality, and persistent underrepresentation.

Disaggregation and public reporting will help to ensure that agencies that deliver vital services to New York's residents base service delivery on information that accurately captures the diversity of demographics and service needs in New York City. Furthermore, the lack of a uniform data collection method makes obtaining an accurate and specific description of racial discrimination in health care, education, housing, and social service delivery difficult. The existing data collection does not allow for regularly collecting race data on agency, provider, and institutional behavior. Data collection, analysis, and disaggregation are integral components in properly identifying, monitoring, and addressing social service needs for the growing and diverse New York State Asian communities.

Recommendations: City agencies need to utilize a standard approach to data collection, disaggregation, and reporting on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. Any policy should mandate a standard approach to the collection, disaggregation, and reporting of demographic data on New York's diverse AAPI community. This includes disaggregation of AAPI ethnic categories to at least 22 categories, information on country of origin and years in the United States, and information on the top 20 most frequently spoken Asian languages. The policy must also ensure data is made publicly available at regular intervals.

2) Language Justice

Seventy percent of APAs in NYC are foreign-born and have high rates of limited English proficiency (LEP), as 38% of AAPIs in the New York metropolitan area are LEP compared to 16% of the overall population. Rates among subgroups in NYC range widely, with the highest rates among Chinese (60.0%), Korean (54.0%), and Bangladeshi (54.0%) communities, and lower rates among Pakistani (42.0%), Indian (30.0%), and Filipino (22.0%) communities. AAPIs also have the highest rate of linguistic isolation of any group in the City at 42%, meaning that no one over the age of 14 in the household speaks English well or at all (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016 American Community Survey.)

Executive Order 120 mandates City agencies to provide language assistance to limited English proficient individuals in six languages. Two of the six languages are Asian languages (Chinese and Korean). Currently, Executive Order 120 leaves out the Bengali speaking community, one of the fastest growing ethnic groups with high limited English proficiency rates. Implementation by City agencies have varied, and individuals across the City are still reporting unavailability of interpreters and translated documents.

Individuals must be able to access needed services in a language they understand, ensuring that these individuals receive services in a timely manner, avoiding possible costlier interventions.

Recommendations: The City should expand Executive Order 120 and Local Law 30 by increasing the number of languages that City agencies are mandated to translate from six to nine. This change would then mirror the Department of Education’s policy that mandates nine covered languages. These nine languages plus English addresses the language needs of nearly 96% of New Yorkers served. Four of these languages are Asian languages (Chinese, Bengali, Urdu, and Korean). By expanding Executive Order 120, there will be more translation and interpretation services in order to cover additional Asian languages. City agencies must also be fully funded to offer language accessible services. The NYC Commission of Human Rights should explore the review of language access plans and conduct “secret shopper” efforts.

3) Budget Justice

Budget justice must support Asian American community based organizations and their human services workers as well as leverage services that do not perpetuate violence and inequity. Budget justice recommendations have been organized under organizations, workers, and services.

Organizations

The City currently contracts with approximately 1,200 organizations for \$4 billion annually in human services funding. The top 100 organizations hold 70% of all human services contract funding, the top 30 organizations hold 45% of all human services contract funding. According to the Asian American Federation, while Asian Americans now make up close to 15 percent of New York City’s population, the Asian American community only received 1.4% of the contracts and just 3.1% of the contract dollars given by city agencies to social service providers in the past 13 years.

Recommendations: The City should change contract procurement policies to give more credit to community service providers with language and cultural competency and to build capacity among Asian-focused service providers so that they may better compete for City service contracts.

For-profit organizations can be classified as Minority and Women Business Enterprises. Nonprofit organizations do not have owners and cannot be classified as MWBE. The City should create a new classification for nonprofit organizations that are people of color, women, immigrant, and LGBTQI led. This means the mission, leadership, and community served are people of color, women, immigrant, and LGBTQI.

Local Law 1 must be amended for the City to better achieve social justice through procurement.

Workers

In addition to organizations, we must center nonprofit human services workers. Systematic underinvestment in nonprofits is not an accident. Veterans of the sector strongly believe human services organizations are devalued because of who they serve and who they employ. The City and State budgets

are balanced on the backs of low-income neighborhoods and BIPOC communities who get reduced services, and a workforce that is predominantly made up of women and people of color who are paid poverty-level wages due to insufficient contract funding.

Human services workers are overwhelmingly female (66%), over two-thirds are full-time workers of color (68%), and nearly half (46%) are women of color. These shares are considerably higher than for New York City's overall private sector workforce, where only a quarter (26%) of private sector workers overall are women of color. As such, pay disparities in this sector have important consequences for race and gender equity.

While government agencies ask providers to hire highly trained staff to deliver services, they effectively mandate wages far below the demands of their roles and the value of their skills. Sixty-three percent of human services workers have a four-year college degree or better, while only making a median annual salary of \$47,000, compared to over \$66,000 for a comparable job in government.⁸ This median salary means that 15 percent of all human services workers (both full and part-time) qualified for food stamps in the 2016-18 period, higher than the 12 percent share for all private sector workers, and much higher than for government employees (9 percent).⁹ These workers came to the frontlines of the pandemic with inadequate supplies and were asked to meet growing community needs with fewer resources. Many come from the communities in which they work, meaning that government is contributing to the multi-generational economic structural inequity that providers are asked to solve.

Recommendations: The City must commit to paying equitable wages to contracted human services workers. Government is the main driver of human services salaries, and often sets salary rates on contracts. Setting low rates results in tax dollars being used to fund poverty level wages, where 15 percent of human services workers qualify for food stamps.¹⁶ Government must enact a comprehensive plan to raise the wages of the sector to be commensurate with wages of government employees. Every contract must have annual Cost of Living Adjustments (COLA) with increased funding.

The City must ensure that all contracted services to nonprofit organizations pay living wage, address compression, have COLA, and cover the full cost of providing services. In addition to human services, this includes education, housing, criminal justice, health care, home care, and other services. For example, home care workers are paid minimum wage but take care of homebound seniors and individuals with development disabilities. The NYC Human Resources Administration (HRA) should work with the NYS Department of Health to increase Medicaid funding for home care worker compensation, including home care workers with 24-hour shifts. Of the 250,000 home care workers in New York, about 33,000 home care workers have 24-hour shifts but are paid 13 hours according to Medicaid, contractual, and union agreements.

Services

The City currently allocates \$6 billion toward the NYPD and \$4 billion toward human services. To promote racial justice, the City should invest in communities, not over-policing.

Recommendations: The City should ensure that the development, implementation, and evaluation of human services is racially just. The City should:

- Get people with lived experience at the decision-making table – from City Hall to city agencies, especially those overseeing child welfare and juvenile justice
- Reform the NYC Department of Education's K-12 curriculum by ending White Supremacist narratives so that children of color are educated in a more affirming and reflective environment
- Address the root causes of NYC's highly racially segregated neighborhoods and schools
- Target services specifically for young men of color



- Target workforce development programs for immigrant New Yorkers
- Expand Family Enrichment Centers administered by the NYC Administration for Children's Services
- Fund community led violence interruption and reduction programs overseen by the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, such as using credible messengers from the community to reduce dependency on policing and assist the community to self-resolve gun violence

Please feel free to contact me at (212) 941-0920 x 143 or who@cpc-nyc.org for further information. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.