

Remarks by Board Vice President Susana Reyes Regarding Stopping AAPI Hate

Delivered during the Board meeting on March 23, 2021

Thank you, President McClain-Hill, for coming forward in solidarity. I want to thank our Mayor and our city leaders for their consistent leadership on this issue, and for their persistence standing strongly against anti-Asian xenophobia and hate.

I speak before you today as your commissioner of Asian descent, who has lived experiences mirror the challenges and barriers faced by Asian families, coworkers, employees and friends. As a parent of four daughters who are part Chinese and part Filipino, I'm grief stricken, disgusted, frustrated and angry about the rising hate incidents and crimes. And frankly my fears and anxiety are on the rise. As a trusted public institution, I believe the public and employees should know how LADWP feels, where we stand and what we are doing about it.

The fatal shootings of eight people in Atlanta, including six Asian women, put into sharp focus the calls to end anti-Asian racism. But this is just the latest of a devastating string of incidents that have grabbed more attention since the beginning of the pandemic. As we mourn for the victims we must resist reducing them to statistics of anti-Asian violence. Say their names. Humanize them. Render them visible and recognize that the present moment of anti-Asian violence is a reflection of our brutal and violent history. We must begin talking about this violence in a way that centers our most marginalized and at-risk groups.

Unfortunately, it is easier to scapegoat the direct anger and rage against COVID-19 rather than to really understand the problem in full complexity. Hate crimes are motivated by prejudice and bias against the victims actual or perceived race, religion, sexual orientation or national origins. The pandemic has laid bare the deep economic and racial disparities that have shaped and continue to shape the lives of different racial communities that LADWP deserves. We need to reckon with both the history and the ongoing impact that racism, hate and violence are having on our communities especially on women, youth and seniors who are particularly vulnerable. We need to reckon also with our invisibility, because Asian-Americans are lumped together as a monolith that does not distinguish the uniqueness of each race and it does injustice to groups disproportionately impacted. They should be more heard and seen.

A good place to begin is for all of us to acknowledge that Asian-American hate and racism exists in the first place. Dismantling that model minority myth, that stereotype, is key, because it is in that stereotype through which the successes of a few Asians obscure the stark inequities of

other groups. This stereotype essentially absolved white systems from taking real accountability. I really have to mention that just for a fact. There are wide differences between different Asian-American groups, many are struggling economically. We have Asian Americans who work, healthcare workers, nurses, restaurant workers, grocery workers and others who have been the victims of hate. And they have suffered disproportionately from the pandemic.

Understanding Asian-American culture is paramount. It is a culture where there is sometimes a reluctance to contact law enforcement for a variety of reasons that include language barriers. It is also a culture of keeping heads down when it comes to conflict and things that humiliate them that they don't want to talk about it. But this is not the time to be passive because any act of hate against any one of us is an act of hate against all of us.

I'm heartened by the work our city is doing to the search in Asian hate crimes. There are more than 40 appointed commissioners who are of AAPI descent in our boards and commission throughout the city. We met with Mayor Garcetti recognizing the need for action even before the Atlanta shooting. The formation of a city taskforce on AAPI hate incidents and crimes are in the works. Our city council is working on legislation to improve city response and reporting. The new Civil and Human Rights Equity Department established by Mayor Garcetti is tasked to monitor and address claims against racism. And many of those are civil rights violations, from verbal attacks to racial slurs, to discrimination in the workplace. Our city's "Hate has no place in LA" program literally means that there's no part in LA that we will accept hate and that there will be repercussions for violators. Reporting all incidents of hate crimes should not be feared or shamed.

And to all of our Asian-American employees, we see you. We hear you. And as President McClain-Hill said, we are one big family. At times like this the reasonable thing managers can do for Asian-American employees is use their privilege to acknowledge the anti-Asian violence and give space for impacted individuals to process, discuss, grieve and heal.

And anything concerning marginalization has a place to be discussed in the workplace, because the workplace repeats all of the same patterns we see in society at-large. The department's racial equity plan the needed more than ever to provide a multidimensional solution that will transform LADWP using that diversity and equity lens to address disparities. The plans should be a living document, it should guide the way we operate and the way we serve. The department's equal employment opportunity policy and program set the tone and baseline for how employees should treat each other at work and for the department to sustain a culture that has zero tolerance for hate, harassment and discrimination. And as for department executives and decision makers, becoming more of an ally in racial equity is the most impactful action you can take. How are you being anti-racist in supporting our employee with education and resources? How are you transforming policies and practices to level the playing field? Be more transparent and inclusive and provide resources and create opportunities for our employees to thrive. When you use aspects of your identities and you hold power, and you use your advantage position to advocate for people in less advantaged positions, you are an ally. Thank you.

I urge all of us stand together against hate. Diversity is our strength but it is also fragile. It must be protected, appreciated and sustained. I encourage all DWP employees to get engaged for the long haul, not just in this moment. The only way we will see things shift and change is when all of us are in this struggle for racial justice and equity together. Thank you for this time and opportunity.