

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 18, 2021

VIA ELECTRONIC DELIVERY

The Honorable Merrick Garland
Attorney General of the United States
U.S. Department of Justice
Office of the Attorney General
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Attorney General Garland:

I write to express my deep alarm over the rising rate of violent attacks and racist harassment against the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community, including the recent mass murder of eight individuals, which included six Asian American women in Atlanta, Georgia. The spike in anti-AAPI hate is a dire – and deadly – national crisis. The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) must bring to bear the full force of its resources and authorities to investigate and prosecute these heinous crimes. Punishment must be swift, severe and certain to deter these purveyors of hate from acting on their prejudices in the form of violent threats and violent acts against Asian Americans.

As an Executive Department that was created to destroy the Ku Klux Klan, I am confident that DOJ possesses the capacity and capability to combat a growing domestic security threat that makes a mockery of our Nation's founding creed to establish justice and ensure domestic tranquility. It is up to DOJ's leadership to galvanize and focus the Department's expertise to prioritize combatting hate crimes, violent acts and violent threats against the AAPI community. Accordingly, I request that DOJ:

- Establish a "strike force" to consolidate prosecutorial focus and resources to aggressively build Federal criminal cases against perpetrators of AAPI hate crimes and other violent acts – while investigating potential coordination among suspects; and
- Strengthen DOJ guidance to every U.S. Attorney addressing how to effectively enforce all appropriate Federal statutes related to anti-AAPI crimes and affirming the importance of prosecuting such criminal violations to the fullest extent of the law to deter bad actors and send a clear message that the United States Government will demonstrate zero tolerance for perpetrators of hate crimes and other criminal acts targeting Asian Americans.

The AAPI community's confidence in the law enforcement community was seriously damaged by the Sheriff of Cherokee County Office's outrageous decision to not only employ – but also deploy as the Sheriff's national spokesperson – a racist individual who exhibited more empathy for a mass murderer than the victims of his heinous crime, and then was found to have proudly touted a hateful and ignorant anti-Asian t-shirt on social media.

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When a leading local law enforcement official, only hours after a horrific, cold-blooded mass murder, remarks on the alleged suspect that, “Yesterday was a really bad day for him and this is what he did” – it dehumanizes the victims of an apparent violent hate crime and sends the disgraceful and disgusting message that in the United States of America, there remains one set of laws for white men, and another set of laws for non-white men. DOJ must act to combat this dangerous and anti-American message.

In the past, the DOJ has launched “strike force” operations to bring together prosecutors and law enforcement to charge individuals violating Federal laws. A DOJ “strike force” was most recently convened to prosecute individuals who engaged in violent insurrection and seditious conspiracy against the United States of America on January 6, 2021. Using this mechanism sends a strong message that the United States Government is determined and resolute in prosecuting criminals who threaten our Nation, our Constitution and its people to the fullest extent of the law.

As you noted at your confirmation hearing, “Hate crimes tear at the fabric of our community.” Moving forward, DOJ must fully investigate and prosecute cases of AAPI hate crimes and related violent criminal acts. Perpetrators of disgusting hate against Asian Americans must learn that the Federal Government will bring all resources to bear in hunting them down and subjecting them to justice that is swift, severe and certain.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tammy Duckworth". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator