



Chinese-American Planning Council (CPC)

Testimony at the Joint New York State Assembly and Senate Legislative Hearing on the Impact of COVID-19 on the Workforce

August 13th, 2020

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. The mission of the Chinese-American Planning Council, Inc. (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 sensitive, and highly effective in reaching low-income and immigrant individuals and families. With the firm belief that social service can incite 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 today about the disproportionate impact that COVID-19 is having on the workforce.

IMPACTS ON LOW-INCOME, IMMIGRANT AND ASIAN AMERICAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER (AAPI) NEW YORKERS

During COVID-19, CPC continues to provide in person and remote services to our community, from meal delivery to home care to daily wellness checks. We see this impact in three main areas:

- I. Impacts on Frontline Human Services Workers**
- II. Impacts on Excluded Workers**
- III. Anti-Asian and anti-Asian American Discrimination**

I. Impacts on Frontline Human Services Workers

During these difficult times, families rely on human services to provide them with financial assistance, literacy courses, meal deliveries, academic tutoring, and child care. However, the State has continuously cut essential

programs, making it difficult for human service workers to provide the necessary care. Many of our community members work in sectors that are on the frontlines of this pandemic, making them most vulnerable to COVID-19. Despite the essential services that these workers provide, the State has failed to offer substantial support to these communities. Some of the things our staff members and community members reported include:

- Human services workers have not been provided with adequate PPE and safe working conditions by the State. The State should be sourcing and covering the cost of this for contracted human services workers, yet we have largely been left to figure it out on our own. CPC and other agencies have been relying on donations of PPE for our staff since the State has not provided it.
- Human service workers are placing their health on the line to serve their communities. Not only are they struggling to meet the growing demands of the community, they are also underpaid. Frontline workers deserve to be uplifted and be able to support their families.
- Community members reported that personal protective equipment (PPE) is continues to be difficult to find and very expensive. This is also evident in the healthcare sector, where frontline staff have said they are getting only one facemask per week;
- Community members report that while hospitals receive large donations of PPE, pharmacies have been largely overlooked by such humanitarian efforts despite their being in frequent contact with sick people.
- Community members with children or elderly parents at home are so worried about catching the virus that they are even considering quitting their jobs to protect them;
- Many community members are unable to comply by social distancing rules because of overcrowded or insecure housing, and are unable to self-isolate at home because of their living conditions.

Yet while all of this happens, the State has been cutting funding to the very programs and social safety net programs that support these communities and help combat disproportionate health outcomes. Services like senior food programs, youth development, public health, education and workforce training, and others are experiencing more demand than ever before, yet instead of boosting funding to these programs, these programs are the first on the chopping block during the quarterly review.

II. Impacts on Excluded Workers

While many frontline workers are being forced to endanger ourselves while working on the front lines of this crisis, many are experiencing unprecedented mass unemployment. Unemployment claims by AAPIs have spiked 6,900%, by far the largest percentage increase experienced by any racial group and a larger percentage relative to AAPIs share of the labor force compared to other racial groups. Many more are not captured by the State's labor reports because of ineligibility for unemployment insurance. Some of the things our community members reported include:

- More than half of our community members surveyed reported that they are out of work or income, and will run out of money in the coming weeks;
- Many community members have reported that they had their working hours decreased or totally eliminated as declining revenues force small businesses to either close or operate at reduced capacity;
- During the last four weeks of April, it was reported that 147,000 Asian workers in New York have filed



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initial unemployment claims, a 6,900% increase;

- Many of our community members that are limited English proficient (LEP) have inaccurate information or lacking up-to-date information about how to receive benefits. For business owners, none of the US. Small Business Administration's relief services provide translations in Asian languages on their website;
- Many of our community members continue to work, either because they are essential workers or because they cannot afford to stop working in informal jobs since they are left out of Federal relief and State unemployment benefits;
- In one of our preschool families, 20 out of 24 families lost all income within two weeks, and less than half qualify for Federal relief or State unemployment, leaving them unable to pay rent, buy groceries or pay for prescriptions;
- Our young people reporting caring for their younger siblings while their parents work (and juggling remote learning simultaneously), and rationing their daily food intake because they are running out of food;
- Children and young adults in our youth programs, especially those in multi-generational families, have reported that due to cultural norms, their adult family members have kept the financial status of the family and/or health diagnosis of family members secret. This has contributed to acute spikes in mental health issues for our young people, some who have shared ideas of self-harm with staff;
- CPC staff reported losing contact with community members as the economic fallout of the crisis continues. Many community members have terminated their internet or phone plans, causing families to be further isolated from our outreach efforts. While telecom providers have agreed to continue service if customers lapse in bill payment, community members are concerned about debt collection, building credit, fines, and impact on their immigration status, a fear that was already challenging prior to the crisis.

III. Anti-Asian and anti-Asian American Discrimination

Our Asian American, particularly East Asian community members are experiencing a double virus of discrimination and racism. Our community members have been experiencing:

- Faced great losses in their businesses due to the pervasive racism and xenophobia sentiments before there was even a reported case of COVID-19 in the State;
- Verbal and physical harassment while traveling to work or at work. This includes frontline healthcare and essential workers who have become increasingly scared of going to work;
- Fears of going outside or seeking treatment because of reports of harassment and violence against Asian Americans.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

New York has yet to provide comprehensive support for our human services, our workers and small businesses. Our

staff have been designated by the State as essential workers, yet we are on the front lines without adequate PPE, and many of us barely making minimum wage. We need to fully fund our essential workers, and fully fund these essential programs and safety net services. CPC urges the State to fully fund all services and contracts through at least FY21, and ensure that contracts have maximum flexibility to allow organizations to meet emerging and changing needs. Further, the State must resist pushing cuts down to localities, where an even greater number of human services contracts are provided through city and municipal governments.

Workers and small businesses continue to struggle as the pandemic wears on with no end in sight. Support for these workers must include wage support and replacement, but on its own that is wholly insufficient for the scale of this crisis. Supports must include housing, healthcare, protections for immigrant New Yorkers, and raising revenues to ensure that this crisis is not balanced on the backs of low-income, immigrant, and New Yorkers of color.

We urge the State to prioritize an emergency relief package for workers, families, and the organizations that are responding to this crisis on the ground, and resist cuts to Medicaid and critical social services programs. We urge the State to suspend rent payments for residential and commercial tenants. We urge the State to pass the New York Health Act as a central part of recovery. And we urge the State to raise revenues rather than cutting services. Our key recommendations include:

- I. Defend Medicaid & Raise Revenue**
- II. Invest in Workers**
- III. Ensure Continuity in Human Services**
- IV. Protect Immigrant New Yorkers, Homeless New Yorkers and New Yorkers in Detention**
- V. Protect Tenants, Homeowners, and Small Businesses**

I. Defend Medicaid & Raise Revenue

- With a further fall in projected revenues, the Governor continues to push cuts to Medicaid to balance the budget. Medicaid cuts are indefensible, especially during a public health crisis. Insistence on the “global cap” has done nothing to support working New Yorkers to date, which has become even more evident during the response to COVID19. With the closure of all but essential services, a period of economic loss is inevitable. The State must ask if its willing to weigh temporary economic slowdown against the long-term public health and resiliency of average New Yorkers.
- Instead of Medicaid caps that would force localities to raise taxes on working New Yorkers displaced by COVID19, New York State must swiftly enact fair and just taxes on the ultra-wealthy and corporations, on pied-a-terre property investors, and stock trade and transfer sales taxes, and invest in the communities hardest hit by COVID-19.
- In addition to defending Medicaid, this crisis has shown the weaknesses of our fragmented healthcare system being tied to employment. We urge the State to prioritize the passage of the New York Health Act as central to the recovery.

II. Invest in Workers



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- New York needs a worker stimulus and wage replacement bill to replace wages lost to date. Whether through forced closure or loss of business, New York must provide replacement for lost wages as well as plans to stimulate the workforce once the state recovers. This should happen regardless of immigration status.
- New York must provide a state relief plan for immigrants and families left out of federal stimulus, just as states like California have done to provide direct cash assistance to those who have gone without relief for the longest. ITIN filers and families with spouses without Social Security Numbers were left out of federal stimulus money, an exclusion that is even more severe than the Child Care and Dependent Credit extended to families with children who are American citizens. We urge the State to pass S8277/A10414 to establish a worker's bailout fund.
- **New York must allocate \$3.5 billion to the Excluded Workers Disaster Income Replacement Fund to provide assistance to those who were left out of the federal relief packages and/or do not qualify for unemployment benefits.** This fund would provide weekly or monthly assistance to workers who have been disregarded in Federal and State aid. Immigrants are at the epicenter of this pandemic and it is vital that we allocate resources to them during these difficult times.
- New York must use a higher percentage of its TANF funding on cash and basic assistance to protect needy families. Unspent TANF dollars are carried over year after year into rainy day funds or are redirected into other state services. As of 2018, New York has accumulated \$547 million in unspent TANF block grant funds, the equivalent of 22% of what the state receives in TANF each year. The time for rainy day emergencies is now. Reserve TANF funds must be spent now to provide much needed basic assistance, childcare, and work support.

III. Ensure Continuity in Human Services Programming, Hazard Pay and PPE for Human Services Agencies

- Human services workers on the front line should be provided with adequate PPE and safe working conditions by the State. The State should be sourcing and covering the cost of this for contracted human services workers, yet we have been left to figure it out on our own. CPC and other agencies have been relying on donations of PPE for our staff since the State has not provided it.
- Human services organizations should be recognized as an essential part of the State's recovery plan and receive assurance that all of our State contracts and State discretionary funding will renew in FY21 so that we can continue our work. Additionally, contracted human services providers should be paid their full budgeted expenses through the end of the next fiscal year even if they are unable meet their contractual obligations due to this public health crisis. This ensures that they are able to provide emergency services and meet urgent needs of their community members, as well as ensures that a

sizable workforce does not experience layoffs during a period of economic turmoil. Human services agencies should receive maximum contractual flexibility in FY21 to meet the evolving and urgent needs of the communities we serve.

- We recommend that the State provide a one year extension for new and existing contracts to mitigate service disruption, especially contracts through Nutrition Outreach and Education Program (NOEP), the Office for New Americans (ONA), and the youth and afterschool programs through New York State Education Department (NYSED), as well as provide additional emergency funding to respond to COVID-19.
- All human services workers receive should receive pay reflective of our commitment and essential services to the City. This includes incentive pay, hazard pay, and annual cost of living adjustments. New York must ensure the “3for5” increase for nonprofits and direct services organizations, full funding of all contracts, and provide PPE and adequate supplies for all contracted agencies.
- Communities of color receive a disproportionately low share of funding and contracts. Asian American and Pacific Islander led organizations receive 1.5% of the funding at the City level and it is similar on the State level. The State must work to correct historic funding inequities that have systematically disadvantaged communities of color.

IV. Protect Immigrant New Yorkers, Homeless New Yorkers, and New Yorkers in Detention

- Data collection on everything to do with COVID-19 and its health and economic impacts must be disaggregated by race, ethnicity, ethnic sub-group, sex and age. It should also include collecting information on written and spoken language, disability status, gender identity, LGBTQIA identity, and socioeconomic status. Data collection should also be carried out in nursing homes, residential facilities, homeless shelters and other congregate settings, detention centers, and capture deaths at home or in the streets. The improvements to data must be extended to dissemination, and utilization to effectively lessen the growing health disparities in the COVID-19 pandemic in New York State. New York State must also pass the AAPI data disaggregation bill A00677/S3662.
- Require translation and interpretation support, as well as in-language hotlines for all information related to COVID-19, health care access, State policies and practices, information about changes to federal law, and benefits and resources.
- New York State must grant clemency, early parole, or home confinement to people incarcerated in jails and immigrant detention centers to mitigate the spread in confined spaces. As part of their release, New York must provide quarantine housing in empty hotels or dormitories to reduce community spread once detainees reunite with families.
- While the State shuts down nearly all its services, ICE agents continue to take advantage of disinformation and public distress to access to our courts and hospitals. New York must declare all hospitals and courthouses off limits to ICE by passing the Protect Our Courts Act and declaring hospitals a sanctuary space. New York must also pass the Access to Representation Act.
- New York must ensure that all people experiencing homelessness have a safe place to social distance, for the duration of the crisis and beyond. We recommend utilizing private hotel rooms to offer a safe space for those experiencing homelessness, and paying for it at the government level.
- New York must ensure that all testing and treatment is free and accessible to all New Yorkers,



regardless of immigration status. If New York implements any contact tracing programs, it should be done with the safety of all immigrants at the forefront, and involve community-based organizations in the process.

V. Protect Tenants, Homeowners, and Small Businesses

- New York must have a rent and mortgage suspension and moratorium on evictions, foreclosure sales, and utility shut offs, for tenants and small businesses alike, and extend the original terms of the eviction moratorium enacted at the start of the crisis. No New Yorker should go without heat or water or be left without a home because they missed payments due to lost wages. Similarly, the necessary curfews and shutdowns that mitigate the spread of COVID19 will mean a drastic loss of income for small business owners. Moratoriums should extend through the duration of the crisis and allow a period of recovery.
- No New Yorker should lose their home or livelihood because they are working together to flatten the curve and keep New York safe. The State should implement a rent and utilities abatement program for the individuals and small businesses hardest hit. Rent payments should be suspended or cancelled for the duration of the crisis, and should be done so universally so as to include people that would be left out of a means tested program, usually the most marginalized and hardest hit. We urge the State to pass S8125A/A10224 and S8190/A10318.
- New York State has led the way in protecting consumers from price gougers. However, many necessary preventative items like soap, hand sanitizer, and over the counter medications remain scarce and reflect a larger supply chain that is increasingly more complex and expensive for small and local businesses to navigate. New York must continue to pursue price gouging at the highest levels, including online reseller platforms that hurt local shops. Fines levied from price gouging should be directly invested back into emergency assistance programs for workers and small businesses.

CPC appreciates the opportunity to testify on these issues that so greatly impact the communities we serve, and look forward to working with you on them. If you have any questions, please contact Carlyn Cowen at ccowen@cpc-nyc.org

Appendix 1: Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Neighborhood Recovery Plan

We are a group of community-based organizations representing the diverse Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community of New York City and partnering together to develop the AAPI Neighborhood Recovery Plan to ensure the long-term recovery of the individuals, families, small businesses, and institutions of our neighborhoods. The AAPI community is the fastest growing racial group in New York, making up 15% of the City and 10% of the State. While AAPIs have the highest rate of poverty in New York City, less than 1.5% of the City's human services contract dollars go to our community.

We remind New Yorkers that COVID-19 is a public health issue, not a racial, ethnic, or immigrant issue. Unfortunately, prior to the Governor's Executive Order to put New York State on PAUSE in late March, AAPI businesses were already struggling from COVID-19, threatening the livelihoods of workers and business owners since January. Unemployment claims by AAPIs have spiked 6,900%, by far the largest percentage increase experienced by any racial group. AAPI community members continue to report increased incidents of public assaults, harassment, and hate crimes. Despite these challenges, AAPIs are serving on the front lines, risking their own health as doctors, nurses, human services workers, early childhood teachers, grocers, delivery workers, and more.

While these are tough fiscal times, we call on the State and City to make smart investments that not only address the immediate need for economic relief but also revitalize neighborhood economies. We also call on the City and State to find equitable ways to raise revenue as opposed to focusing only on budget cuts. We offer the following recommendations – which should be implemented in combination – to ensure that while AAPI neighborhoods were the first to suffer, we will not be the last to recover.

Workers and Economic Security

- Invest in workforce training and placement, including a mass public employment program and private sector jobs
- Expand public benefits, including but not limited to SNAP, SCRIE, and Medicaid
- Support wage replacement for lost wages
- Enact a relief package targeted specifically at workers left out of federal relief, including but not limited to undocumented, gig workers, cash workers, and independent contractors
- Forgive all debt, including medical, loans, rent, utilities, and back taxes
- Provide direct cash assistance to low-income families, including broadband internet access, remote learning equipment, educational supplies, etc.
- Provide ongoing economic support for older adults, such as food, housing, and health care
- Enhance funding for adult literacy, adult education, bridge programs, and other workforce development services
- Extend H1B visas to support businesses to continue employing graduate level workers

Community Based Organizations



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- Include AAPI neighborhood leaders in recovery task forces being formed
- Target funding to address anti-Asian discrimination and harassment
- Ensure full funding of FY20 and FY21 City contracts and City Council discretionary funding, modifying requirements and reimbursing COVID-19 costs
- Provide additional funding for recovery grants to address emerging needs and additional services
- Restore funding for summer programming, including the Beacon Centers, COMPASS, SONYC, Cornerstone, and summer camps
- Support food banks and feeding programs that provide culturally appropriate meals
- Increase funding for community-based organizations to purchase equipment, including computers, laptops, and tablets, for clients and students to use

Small Businesses

- Designate AAPI neighborhoods as economic distressed zones that should be targeted for investment and support similar to “opportunity zones”
- Waive sanitation tickets and other fines, penalties, and fees
- Implement mortgage, business, and property tax abatements/tax holidays
- Provide small business grants for reopening and rehiring
- Provide rental support for small businesses
- Invest in a stimulus fund to support M/WBEs and to start-up new businesses

Housing and Neighborhood Affordability

- Extend eviction moratorium and enact good cause eviction
- Institute a rent freeze for individuals and families who cannot afford rent, including NYCHA
- Provide rent supports/subsidies for families impacted by COVID-19 job loss
- Provide small capital grants or low interest loans to small residential landlords for necessary repairs and upkeep to their properties
- Invest in community land trusts in AAPI neighborhoods
- Provide subsidies for commercial tenants that cannot afford rent, especially in mixed-use buildings

Public Health and Health Care

- Provide free COVID-19 testing for all
- Invest in public and neighborhood-based outreach about health safety precautions on reopening and prevention of relapse
- Provide health care access for undocumented and low-income individuals and families as well as

individuals who have lost jobs

- Invest in comprehensive mental health support to address COVID-19 related trauma and anti-Asian stigma
- Increase reimbursement rates and investments in Federally Qualified Health Centers
- Enhance funding for public hospitals

Digital and Language Access

- Reopen public libraries to provide digital access
- Expand broadband access to digitally isolated communities
- Provide digital devices (smart phones, tablets, and computers) for individuals and families without digital access
- Invest in digital skills training for adults
- Invest in high-quality translated information, including dedicated hotlines for top languages, focusing on all relief and recovery opportunities
- Translate all government and COVID-19 related websites into top languages, using the Google extension for translation if necessary

Sincerely,

Academy of Medical & Public Health Services

Adhikaar Apex for Youth

Asian Americans for Equality

Brooklyn Chinese-American Association

Charles B. Wang Community Health Center

Chen Dance Center

Chhaya CDC

Chinatown Manpower Project

Chinatown YMCA

Chinese Methodist Center Corporation

Chinese Progressive Association



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Coalition for Asian American Children and Families

Council of People's Organization

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Hamilton-Madison House

Korean American Family Service Center

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Mekong

MinKwon Center for Community Action

Museum of Chinese in America

Sakhi for South Asian Women

South Asian Council for Social Services

South Asian Youth Action

United East Athletics Association

Womankind

YMCA of Greater NY