

Good afternoon, Council President and Council Members. My name is Ji-Young Cho, Executive Director of Korean Community Service Center. On behalf of the staff, volunteers, and friends of KCSC, I would like to express great appreciation for your support of the Asian American community of Montgomery County, especially at this time when the health and mental health of our community is at such high risk. KCSC believes that a special appropriation is critically needed at this time to enhance the Asian American Health Initiative's COVID-19 response.

Because of significant cultural barriers, economic and social vulnerabilities, and limited English proficiency, our clients have been deeply impacted by the pandemic, enduring disproportionate levels of isolation, depression, and fear with related health and social consequences. Most recently, we are witnessing increasing anxieties and fears because of rising infection rates due to the Delta variant.

In addition to the health consequences of the pandemic, there has been a severe economic impact on our community. Many Asian small businesses have had to close permanently or drastically reduce workhours and downsize staff. As a result, our community members have been struggling and increasingly in desperate financial straits. Over the last year and a half, ongoing school closures and limited summer activities have had an emotional toll on kids and parents alike. Fortunately, KCSC was able to provide emergency rental assistance and grocery coupon support through our safety net program, mitigating some of the most serious financial consequences of the pandemic. Through the Sharing Love Campaign, KCSC raised over \$350,000 directly from community members and ethnic churches. At the same time, we anticipate there will be ongoing needs in the coming months.

KCSC has also been working hard to educate and encourage our community members to get vaccinated, we are aware that some vaccine hesitancy persists due to concerns about the safety of the vaccine, confusion about how to make an appointment to get a vaccine, and misconceptions about how much getting the vaccine might cost. We are currently working closely with community leaders and other influencers to spread the word about the importance of getting the vaccine but much more work is still needed.

In the past year, hate crimes and discrimination against Asian community members have risen exponentially. The country was naturally shocked when eight Atlanta spa workers were slain, yet since the beginning of the pandemic, there have been thousands of hate crimes reported across the USA, disproportionately affecting Asian business owners, senior citizens, school-aged and college-level kids, and women. Here in Montgomery County, several violent incidents against Asian Americans have been reported; for example, last February, two Asian American business owners were attacked and robbed in Montgomery County. KCSC anecdotally knows of many community members who have directly experienced a bias-related incident or know of someone in the community who has experienced one. Even KCSC's staff and volunteers are affected; one volunteer was called a racial epithet as she was leaving her car in the parking lot of the building where she lived.

To ensure a healthy and emotionally secure community, we need the continuing support of Montgomery County Council members. We sincerely appreciate your deep commitment for our community. Thank you.