Dear friends,

Twenty-five years ago, NAPAWF’s Founding Sisters acted upon their audacious belief that Asian American and Pacific Islander women’s voices matter. In a world that too often renders us invisible, they fiercely asserted that AAPI women should be seen and heard – and NAPAWF was founded.

Today – right now – NAPAWF is leading the fight for justice for AAPI women and girls. We’re working at the intersection of racism, gender, and economic inequality.

We are the only national organization working to build power with AAPI women and girls, to ensure that we have a voice in making the critical decisions that affect our lives, families, and communities.

In this season of gratitude, I want to thank you for standing beside us. It has been an especially challenging year, and you have made our work possible.

In March, six Asian American women were shot to death at Atlanta-area spas, targeted for their gender and race. The killings in Atlanta came against a backdrop of rising anti-AAPI hate related to Covid and a general feeling of insecurity among AAPIs. And now, our reproductive rights are on the line.

With your financial and moral support, we are making progress, even in the face of such difficulty.

Following the Atlanta tragedy, NAPAWF went with our partners to the White House for help, and we got what we asked for – everything from programs for survivors of gender-based violence to hate crime information in languages commonly spoken by AAPIs. We’ve been investing in our new Texas chapter and supporting AAPI Texans in reclaiming their bodily autonomy. Our Florida chapter is fighting back a copycat abortion bill. And we celebrated two long-fought victories on reproductive rights this year, one in Illinois and the other in New York. Read on to learn more in this edition of Fierce Advocate.

Where do we go from here? We need your continued support to mobilize AAPI women to vote and continue to make the experiences of AAPI women and girls visible through media and advocacy – and fight for solutions that will help increase equality and agency for AAPI women and girls.

In 2022, we will elect representatives who hear us and understand our needs, and who have our best interests at heart. Last year, we had exceptionally good results, with 80% of the people we spoke with turning out to vote in the presidential election. We intend to use lessons learned and reach even more voters this year, particularly through our newly launched Membership-at-Large program.

Thank you again, from the bottom of my heart, for supporting our work in this extremely challenging year. And please stay with us. We need you to keep fighting alongside us for AAPI women’s safety, dignity, and rights.

In solidarity,

Sung Yeon Choimorrow (she/her/hers)
Executive Director
Atlanta Spa Killings: Where We Are Today, Where We’re Going

2021 was marked by tragedy: the slaughter of six Asian American women at massage parlors in the Atlanta metro area. We grieved with our communities, holding virtual and in-person vigils in Atlanta and across the country. Then we quickly pivoted to reshape the media narrative, which initially and incorrectly cast the murders as simply another product of Covid-era anti-Asian hate.

Our analysis was this:

_The Atlanta spa killings were not just another symptom of Covid-related anti-AAPI hate. This was something far more sinister, stemming from a history of misogyny and sexualized violence against AAPI women that stretches back to our country’s founding._

NAPAWF took interview after interview with the media to get that message across and to humanize AAPI women in the public eye. In the week following the massacre, more than 1,600 articles were published that quoted or referenced NAPAWF and our analysis of the killings. NAPAWF staff were interviewed, or our analysis referenced, in more than 50 TV and radio programs. We injected the critical intersection of gender and race into the national conversation.

NAPAWF met with the White House regularly, speaking directly with President Biden on three separate occasions following the killings. We asked for help responding to the intersectional challenges faced by AAPI women, and the White House delivered on our asks:

- Providing nearly $49.5 million in services for victims of gender-based violence
- Making it possible to report hate crimes in multiple Asian languages, which removes a serious barrier to reporting for many AAPI people
- Reestablishing the AAPI White House Initiative, disbanded under the previous administration, to combat anti-AAPI hate and particularly gender-based violence
- Incorporating a number of NAPAWF’s recommendations in the National Gender Strategy on Equity and Equality, including the impact of intersecting forms of discrimination such as race, sexual orientation, disability, age, religion, and socioeconomic status.

Moving forward, NAPAWF’s Georgia chapter is working to remind the public that the victims of the Atlanta shootings were low-wage, frontline workers in the service industry. The Georgia team is building a campaign around gender and economic justice, focused on the most urgent needs of working-class AAPI women and girls and targeting the root causes of violence towards our people.

NAPAWF has worked with a laser focus on the intersection of gender and race for the last 25 years. The Atlanta spa killings represented a turning point: for the first time, we are being seen, and we are being heard. NAPAWF will continue to lift up our community and knock down the sexualized, fetishized stereotypes that objectify us, deny our humanity, and threaten our existence.
On September 1, Senate Bill 8 (SB8) became law in Texas. It bans most abortions in the state and allows all private citizens to sue anyone who helps another person obtain an abortion. Florida and Ohio have introduced copycat laws, and other states are following suit. At the same time, the Supreme Court recently heard oral arguments in Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization, a Mississippi case that would overturn Roe v. Wade and clear the path for any state to ban abortion.

NAPAWF is spearheading the fight for reproductive freedom in the AAPI community and among all people of color. People of color stand the most to lose because poverty, immigration status, or lack of fluency in English make it difficult, even in the best of times, to access reproductive information and services.

NAPAWF has been mobilizing our base and making progress. These victories offer glimmers of hope:

- NAPAWF’s Chicago chapter celebrated a big win in October, when Illinois rolled back its harmful Parental Notification Act. The law, which required that a minor’s parents be notified before an abortion procedure could take place, effectively blocked abortion access for most young people. Young AAPI people were particularly impacted, facing additional barriers such as language access and cultural stigmas. NAPAWF’s Chicago chapter worked in coalition with more than 60 organizations in Illinois for this result.

- NAPAWF’s New York chapter campaigned for more than two years against a New York State bill that would restrict access to abortion for AAPI women. The bill would oblige abortion providers to interrogate AAPI women on whether they would prefer to have a son over a daughter, and then deny an abortion if such a preference is detected. This deeply invades our privacy and perpetuates racist, untrue myths about a preference for sons among Asian mothers. The New York City Council responded to our campaign by unanimously passing a resolution condemning the bill’s racist restrictions to abortion access. That resolution sends a strong message to the New York State legislature that the bill will not be allowed to pass into law.

I share my abortion story openly and unapologetically because I want to counter stigma, particularly in communities that don’t often talk about these experiences. I’m a Korean American woman who grew up in church, and when I had my abortion, I thought I was the only one. Now that I work at an abortion clinic, I know for a fact that isn’t the case! I want AAPI people, especially those that come from conservative religious backgrounds, to know that abortion is normal and okay and that they’re not alone. Also, sharing my abortion story with other AAPI folks and listening to them share their own stories is such a deeply healing experience.”

– NAPAWF Texas Member (name withheld for security)
We are collecting information on AAPI women’s attitudes towards abortion and communicating that information to the courts, the public, and policymakers:

- NAPAWF established chapters in Texas and Florida this year, and our new members have been hard at work protesting the law and copycat bill. Members rallied against SB8 on October 2 in Houston and Tampa, as well as Atlanta and Washington, DC.

- We submitted an amicus brief to the Supreme Court in the Dobbs case, which highlights the specific experiences of AAPI women that the Mississippi law does not take into account.

- We have shared with policymakers the results of our polling data, such as the fact that eight in ten AAPI women feel that having control over their reproduction produces more positive family outcomes.

- We are conducting original research on community knowledge of medication abortion and access to it among AAPIs. We are seeking AAPI participants in the study: please visit napawf.org/sfpstudy to sign up.

- We are setting the policy agenda. NAPAWF led a working group of ten AAPI organizations in developing an AAPI Reproductive Justice Agenda, which outlines the issues that matter most to our communities, such as decriminalizing women’s bodies, among other issues.

NAPAWF is making clear that AAPI women expect our representatives and government leaders to protect our bodily autonomy and not interfere in our reproductive decisions. We are gearing up for 2022, putting our organizing muscle behind getting out the AAPI vote for the midterm elections.

“AAPI voters have largely been ignored by political and voter mobilization campaigns and, even when that isn’t the case, the programs conducted in our communities have traditionally been small-scale and under-resourced. As a result, AAPI voter turnout was low compared to other racial and ethnic groups as recently as 2012.

But that is changing, in spite of the voter suppression we face. In the 2020 general election, 6.6 percent of first-time voters in Georgia were AAPI, even though they only account for 2.5 percent of registered voters in the state.”

– Former NAPAWF staff member Nina Reddy, “People Are Finally Paying Attention to AAPI Voters. But For How Long?” Ms. Magazine

NAPAWF members at “Rally for Abortion Justice” marches in Florida
Beijing in the Rain: NAPAWF’s Origin Story

It all started in China in 1995. The Ford Foundation and Ms. Foundation sponsored more than 100 AAPI activists to participate in the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing.

That conference was pivotal in advancing women’s rights and laid out an agenda for reaching global gender equity. It’s where Hillary Clinton, then first lady of the United States, made her famous “Women’s Rights Are Human Rights” speech, revolutionary for the time.

Yet, in spite of the progress being made in Beijing, the AAPI women activists were at a loss. There wasn’t a space for them to engage on their issues and challenges.

There was also little understanding for what they were seeking. In fact, some participants suggested the AAPI women join the delegations from their countries of heritage, missing the point that their challenges were a product of their race, gender, and place: they were Americans.

In the absence of any established space for them, the AAPI women at the conference convened one for themselves. In a rain-soaked suburb of Beijing, 100 AAPI women gathered and pledged that they would build a national, progressive, multi-issue movement by and for AAPI women when they returned home to the US.

The following year, 1996, the National Asian Pacific American Women’s Forum was founded.

Since then, NAPAWF has grown to embrace hundreds of members across the country who help determine our policy priorities, participate in NAPAWF trainings to build their leadership skills, and work hard to get AAPI women out to vote. Our mission has coalesced around the intersectional reproductive justice framework, which allows us to look at the many overlapping issues that our communities face, like poverty, racism, and barriers to health care.

In 1834, Afong Moy was brought to the US from China by American traders and put on public display as an exotic curiosity. Thus began a long history of AAPI women having been dehumanized, exoticized, and fetishized in the eyes of mainstream America. In 1875, the Page Act blocked unmarried Chinese women from entering the United States for fear that they would turn to prostitution. US military activity in the Pacific and the “military-sexual complex” later cemented such feelings towards AAPI women, who were seen as a source of sex and comfort.

NAPAWF is unraveling a knotty history of gender-based racism towards AAPI women, which involves deeply ingrained, centuries-old biases. We are picking apart stereotypes and weaving new stories for AAPI women and girls, in which we are truly seen and heard for the full human beings we are.
The Next 25 Years

Our 25th year has reaffirmed the importance of NAPAWF’s work. We’ve been speaking out for the past two and a half decades about the need for an intersectional lens, about the urgent economic and political issues facing immigrant women and families, about the dangers that stereotypes about AAPI women pose to our lives and autonomy. For the first time ... people are listening.

With this momentum, we have built our Florida and Texas chapters and launched our Membership-at-Large program, bringing in AAPI women across the country who have been seeking community and a place to make change.

We must keep going, building power with AAPI women. NAPAWF continues to work towards an America in which we cannot be hated, harmed, or killed; discriminated against because of our race or gender; excluded because we don’t speak English; or barred from exercising our basic human right to decide how, when, and whether to have a family.

Support AAPI Women and Girls

AAPI women’s voices are finally being heard – and with the midterm elections coming in 2022, we need your help to make sure we can continue to be heard at the ballot box. Your support will help us reach out to AAPI women voters in multiple languages, so that voters in states like Georgia, Florida, and Texas know how to exercise their right to vote, even and especially in the face of voter suppression. Your gift can make a difference in these crucial states, where the AAPI population has grown.

You can donate at napawf.org/donate or by mailing a check to:
PO Box 13255
Chicago, IL 60613

You can increase the impact of your gift by starting a monthly donation! As we build power with AAPI women and girls over the long term, support from donors like you is vital.
Support AAPI Women and Girls

NAPAWF is one of the only groups building power with AAPI women and girls. When issues such as health care access and reproductive freedom are at stake, we must make sure that our communities’ voices are heard.

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WWW.NAPAWF.ORG  facebook  Instagram  Twitter  @NAPAWF

Our mission is to build collective power of all AAPI women and girls to gain full agency over our lives, our families, and our communities.

Read this issue of the Fierce Advocate online by visiting www.napawf.org/fierce-advocate/winter-2021