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Advocacy Groups, Community Organizations and Science Associations Urge President-elect Joe Biden to End Justice Department’s “China Initiative”

In a letter to President-elect Biden, groups voice concerns over the racial profiling of Asian Americans and Asian immigrants

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, a group of community organizations, advocacy groups, science associations, and individuals sent a letter to President-elect Joe Biden urging the incoming administration to end the Justice Department’s “China Initiative” and take further steps to combat the pervasive racial bias and targeting of Asian American and Asian immigrant scientists, researchers, and students by the federal government. Among the signatories are people who have been directly impacted by the government’s unjust prosecutions of Asian Americans.

The letter, spearheaded by the Asian Americans Advancing Justice affiliation, Brennan Center for Justice, and APA Justice Task Force, denounces the “China Initiative” for discriminatory investigations and prosecutions of Asian Americans and Asian immigrants, particularly those of Chinese descent working in fields of science. Many of the investigations and prosecutions under this initiative target people with any “nexus to China” rather than on evidence of economic espionage as it purports to do, which has revealed a sharp rise in the profiling and targeting of Asian American and Asian immigrant scientists and researchers.

Even after not finding any evidence of espionage, federal prosecutors are charging many Asian Americans and Asian immigrants with federal crimes based on administrative errors or minor offenses such as failing to disclose information to universities or research institutions and other activities under the pretext of combating economic espionage. As a result, Asian American and Asian immigrant scientists, researchers, and scholars are ensnared by overzealous prosecutions riddled with racial bias that are ruining careers and leaving lives in shambles.

The letter includes a set of recommendations, which first calls for an immediate end to the “China Initiative” and a complete review of all prosecutions and investigations closed prior to prosecution under the initiative. It also urges the incoming administration to review and take measures throughout the Federal Government’s law enforcement, intelligence, and scientific research funding agencies to combat other patterns of racial bias against Asian American and Asian immigrant scientists and federal employees. The letter and list of organizations and individuals that signed on can be found [here](#).

“This latest wave of xenophobia against Asian Americans and Asian immigrants follows a long history of Asian Americans and immigrants being stereotyped as “perpetual foreigners,” scapegoated, and profiled as spies disloyal to the United States,” said John C. Yang, Advancing Justice – AAJC’s president and executive director. “Individual cases of wrongful arrests and prosecutions of Asian American scientists and researchers along with racial rhetoric from public officials reveal that racial bias exists and has translated into real harm for the Asian American community.”

"Basing criminal investigations on national origin and Chinese ancestry is unconstitutional and a waste of resources," said Glenn Katon, Advancing Justice - Asian Law Caucus Director of Litigation. "When the government prosecutes scientists and researchers simply so public officials can look tough, no one is made safer. The Biden administration has the chance to protect Asian Americans and Asian immigrants across this country - they should take it."

"Racial profiling has proven to be an ineffective, divisive, and counterproductive law enforcement tactic, and yet the Justice Department inexplicably still promotes its use through programs like the 'China Initiative'," said Brennan Center fellow Michael German, a former FBI agent. "Pressuring all U.S. Attorneys' Offices to initiate 'China Initiative' cases compels racial, ethnic, and national origin profiling, which undermines our security and the rule of law by targeting investigations based on a person's 'nexus to China' rather than evidence of serious wrongdoing."

"Foreign-born scientists of Chinese origin have been an integral part of American innovation and global leadership. Our nation can protect our scientific and research security and successfully compete in the global marketplace for international scientific talent, but not by overzealous, xenophobic targeting of top talents that ruins lives and drives them to foreign countries that have been trying to recruit them unsuccessfully," said Professor Steven Pei, a leader for the APA Justice Task Force.

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About Asian Americans Advancing Justice

Asian Americans Advancing Justice is a national affiliation of five, independent organizations advocating for the civil and human rights of Asian Americans and other underserved communities to promote a fair and equitable society for all. The affiliation's members are: Advancing Justice - AAJC (Washington, DC), Advancing Justice - Asian Law Caucus (San Francisco), Advancing Justice - Los Angeles, Advancing Justice - Atlanta, and Advancing Justice - Chicago.