FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 1, 2021

Contact:
Senator Susan C. Lee  susan.lee@senate.state.md.us
Terry Lierman  terry@liermanadvisors.com

The Human and Scientific Costs of Racial Profiling Must be Heard

Scientific and Civil Rights Leaders and Organizations request US Representative Jamie Raskin, Chair of the House Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, conduct House Hearings to address racial profiling and investigations of scientists and scholars of Chinese and Asian descent

WASHINGTON, D.C. – An alliance of prominent scientific and civil rights leaders and organizations nationwide representing thousands of individuals, spearheaded by Maryland State Senator Susan Lee and the Institute of Human Virology at the University of Maryland Co-Chair Terry Lierman, have signed a letter requesting that US Representative Jamie Raskin (D-MD), Chair of the House Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, conduct an oversight hearing to address the profiling of scientists and scholars of Chinese or Asian descent based on the misguided perception that simply being of Chinese or Asian descent or having ties to China make them prone to espionage.

The alliance has requested the committee look into the broad sweep of the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s counterintelligence efforts and the National Institutes of Health’s related actions against scientists of Chinese or Asian descent which have resulted in the loss of their jobs, reputations and devastation of their lives and families, even though they were later proven innocent.

Maryland State Senate Majority Whip Susan Lee, whose district includes NIH, stated, “While we strongly support efforts to safeguard America’s interests and prosecute wrongdoers, it would be a grave injustice to target, stereotype, or place under suspicion an entire ethnic group. Many of these patriotic scientists have spent a lifetime of work dedicated to advancing medical breakthroughs which have made America one the global leaders in science and technology. They are a part of the solution to the United States’ global challenges, not a threat.”

“The overzealous, broad, unchecked, and overreaching activities fueled by a xenophobic and toxic political climate have not only led to mistakes in investigations or prosecutions and civil rights violations, but also have crippled America’s ability to develop medical innovations that can enhance the quality of and save lives, especially during this Covid-19 pandemic. We need the committee to shine light on any discriminatory policies being employed by those agencies to ensure there is fairness, transparency and accountability,” said Terry Lierman.
For decades, international scientific collaborations and exchanges between United States and foreign academic and research institutions have been strongly encouraged and supported by the NIH and other academic entities, but now, they are being criminalized.

“Science - like America itself - thrives on freedom, openness, and inclusiveness - there is no room for discrimination against men and women from China or anywhere else based on nationality,” former White House science advisor Dr. Neal F. Lane said.

"The PRC Government’s rising nationalism and use of its economic clout to influence U.S. universities and society are real and growing, but any U.S. Government response that assumes all students, scientists, and scholars of Chinese descent are potential intelligence risks is unfair and unwise profiling that has no place in our democracy,” said Dr. Wallace Loh, former President of the University of Maryland, College Park.

To date, Congress has held numerous hearings focused only on the espionage threat, but it has not addressed the civil rights violations of Chinese Americans who have been wrongly targeted or the long-term consequences and damages to the American research enterprise and minority communities if this pattern of racial profiling continues.

“The Department of Justice launched the ‘China Initiative’ to counter perceived ‘national security threats.’ But the past two years have shown an over-emphasis on national security and an under-emphasis on bias. I join others in calling for the end of the ‘China Initiative’,” said Professor Margaret Lewis of Seton Hall University Law School.

“We are deeply concerned with the racial profiling and unjust prosecutions of Asian Americans and immigrants by the government,” said John C. Yang, Advancing Justice – AAJC’s President and Executive Director. “This latest wave of xenophobia has instilled fear within our communities as many Chinese Americans and immigrants are once again caught in our country’s long history of suspicion and racial discrimination against Asian Americans. We urge Congress to engage in oversight on this issue by holding a public hearing on this issue.”

“Xenophobic targeting and persecution of Chinese Americans is causing irreparable damage not only to the impacted persons and their families, but also creates fear, suspicion, and hate towards the Asian American community. It must stop. It is grossly unjust and unfair to target an entire ethnic group from specific countries,” said Dr. Steven Pei and Dr. Jeremy Wu, Co-Leaders of the APA Justice Task Force.

###