



Commonwealth of Virginia
Office of Governor Ralph S. Northam



Annual Report
August 2020

Report prepared by members of the Virginia Asian Advisory Board

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2020 VIRGINIA ASIAN ADVISORY BOARD

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

- **May Nivar**, Chair, Midlothian, Sr. Manager, Regulatory Affairs, Altria Client Services
- **Eric Lin**, Vice Chair, Chesterfield, Principal, The VIE Group
- **Praveendharan Meyyan**, Secretary, Arlington, Senior Economist, Bureau of Labor Statistics
- **Komal Mohindra**, Treasurer, Falls Church, Sr. Private Sector Development Specialist, World Bank Group

MEMBERS

- **Melody Agbisit PhD**, Norfolk, Counselor, Educator and Social Entrepreneur
- **Suja Amir**, Henrico, Policy Analyst, Association of American Physicians and Surgeons
- **Julia K. Chun**, Fairfax, Chief of Staff, Office of Senator Barbara A. Favola
- **Atiqua Hashem**, Glen Allen, General Counsel, ChildFund International USA
- **Razi Hashmi**, Fairfax, Foreign Policy Professional
- **Hyun Lee**, Centreville, Vice President, Korean American Society of VA
- **Justin Lo**, Richmond, Associate General Counsel, Virginia State Corporation Commission
- **Bao “Bobby” Ly**, Springfield, President, Vietnamese American Community Association of MD, DC, and VA
- **Patrick A. Mulloy**, Alexandria, Washington-based Trade Counsel and Consultant
- **Carla Okouchi**, Fairfax, Music Educator and Choral Director
- **Marie A. Sankaran Raval, MD**, Henrico, Pediatric Anesthesiologist and Assistant Professor of Anesthesiology, Department of Anesthesiology, VCU School of Medicine
- **Ssunny Shah**, Roanoke, Hotel Owner
- **Mona H. Siddiqui**, Midlothian, Assistant Attorney General, Office of the Attorney General
- **Jewan “Jack” Tiwari**, Prince William, President, Nepalese American Forum for Political Empowerment; Realtor; and Small Business Owner, Prime Estates, Inc.; and Arbina LLC
- VACANT
- VACANT
- VACANT

EX OFFICIO MEMBERS

- **Brian Ball**, Secretary of Commerce and Trade
- **Daniel Carey, MD**, Secretary of Health and Human Resources
- **Brian Moran**, Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security
- **Atif Qarni**, Secretary of Education
- **Kelly Thomasson**, Secretary of the Commonwealth

ADMINISTRATION

- **Justin Bell, JD**, Board Legal Counsel, Assistant Attorney General, Office of the Attorney General
- **Danielle Campbell**, Board Staff, Special Assistant for Advisory Board Administration, Secretary of the Commonwealth (resigned July 2020)
- **Traci DeShazor**, Board Staff, Deputy Secretary of the Commonwealth
- **Shawn Soares**, Special Assistant for Appointments and Director of Asian American and Pacific Islander Outreach (joined July 2020)
- **Janice Underwood, PhD**, Chief Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Governor Ralph Northam,

On behalf of the Virginia Asian Advisory Board (VAAB), I'm pleased to present you with this year's report of our recommendations of issues impacting the Asian and Pacific Islander (API) community so that your Administration can best serve these constituents.

This year has been unprecedented for our Commonwealth and country. Thank you for your and your administration's leadership as we work to address the public health, safety, and economic crises; and racial injustices. Members of the VAAB and I stand ready to serve our purpose and to support the administration in its efforts.

Your administration has been instrumental in bringing together the four boards (VAAB, Virginia Latino Advisory Board, Virginia African American Advisory Board, and the Council on Women) for collaboration and organization. We had opportunities to find common ground, combine our voices on key issues, and learn from each other. Additionally, I'm pleased to see that we had representatives in the COVID-19 work groups on health equity and education recovery to provide diverse and much needed perspectives.

This participation was in addition to the VAAB's continued work on business and trade; education; and civic engagement. Coincidentally, we had added a committee to focus on health prior to the pandemic to delve into the varying disparities that exist between API communities and other communities in the Commonwealth. Members were also active in their own API communities helping small businesses and other community leaders navigate the various resources, particularly when non-English materials were not readily available.

In our last report, we had already expressed concern about anti-Asian sentiment as a result of APIs, specifically those of Chinese descent, being viewed as national security risks. Today, we add the growing harassment, racism and xenophobia from being viewed as the cause and carriers of the coronavirus. Despite this, many APIs continue to serve as frontline workers or contribute resources toward personal protective equipment. Our community remains resilient in the face of adversity.

While this report centers on the impact this pandemic has had on our focus areas, I highlight several overarching recommendations – the need to disaggregate data and the need for and access to information and resources in multiple languages. We'd like to see all agencies have these capabilities on an ongoing basis; not just during a time of crisis. Additionally, please continue to ensure there are diverse voices seated at the table, not just for equitable representation, but to enrich the dialogue and outcomes.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve the Commonwealth and the API community.

Sincerely,

May Nivar, Chair

ABOUT THE VIRGINIA ASIAN ADVISORY BOARD

Established by statute in 2001 as a governmental entity of the Commonwealth of Virginia, the purpose of the Virginia Asian Advisory Board (“VAAB” or “Board”) shall be to advise the Governor on ways to improve economic and cultural links between the Commonwealth and Asian nations, with a focus on the areas of commerce and trade, art and education, and general government, and on issues affecting the Asian and Pacific Islander (API) communities in the Commonwealth.

According to the Code, the Virginia Asian Advisory Board has the power and duty to:

- Undertake studies and gather information and data in order to accomplish its purposes as set forth in § 2.2-2448.
- Apply for, accept and expend gifts, grants, or donations from public, quasi-public or private sources, including any matching funds as may be designated in the Appropriation Act, to enable it to better carry out its purposes.
- Report annually its findings and recommendations to the Governor. The board may make interim reports to the Governor, as it deems advisable.
- Account annually on its fiscal activities, including any matching funds received or expended by the Board.

The VAAB focuses its work on four key areas that are important to the API community. Board members serve on committees to help advance these areas.

COMMITTEES

- BUSINESS & TRADE
 - Purpose: Examines the barriers to and opportunities for economic prosperity with respect to API owned or focused businesses in the Commonwealth. Additionally, we explore opportunities to enhance global trade with Asian and Pacific Islander partners and attract foreign investment in the Commonwealth.
 - Members: **Bobby Ly (Chair)**, Praveendharan Meyyan, Komal Mohindra, Patrick A. Mulloy, Ssunny Shah
- CIVIC ENGAGEMENT:
 - Purpose: Assesses the engagement of the API community within the Commonwealth in the areas of public services and programs, voter engagement, and civic participation. We explore the barriers to awareness and access, and work to improve communication between the Administration, service and program providers, and our disparate communities.
 - Members: **Justin Lo (Chair)**, Eric Lin, Razi Hashmi, Jewan Tiwari
- EDUCATION
 - Purpose: Focuses on addressing the barriers to achieving a world-class education for APIs and all Virginians. The Asian and Pacific Islander community places high

value on achieving through educational attainment across the educational spectrum; K-12, post-secondary (two and four-year), graduate and professional, as well as trade and adult studies.

- Members: **Carla Okouchi (Chair)**, Julia Chun, Atiqua Hashem, Hyun Lee, Mona Siddiqui

- HEALTH

- Purpose: Delves into the varying health disparities that exist between API communities and other communities in the Commonwealth. Additionally, we examine how the varying social determinants of health affect the delivery and providers of health services to our communities.
- Members: **Melody Agbisit (Chair)**, Suja Amir, Marie Sankaran Raval

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Pursuant to Section 2.2-2450 of the Code of Virginia, the Virginia Asian Advisory Board (VAAB) is pleased to submit to the Honorable Ralph S. Northam this annual report as a summary of its activities, findings, and recommendations.

HEALTH

The VAAB recommends the following actions that are under the purview of the Secretary of Health and Human Resources:

- For Virginia to be a leader in health equity and be able to make sound public health policy, we must insist on high quality, accessible, and reliable disaggregated data that reflects Virginia's diverse and growing API demographics. In the past, the CDC and VDH have not adequately collected API data, however the API community is rapidly growing, and our needs should not be ignored. Therefore, APIs need to be included in data collection, disaggregation, and analysis for all health policy and practice. Additionally, collecting more specific demographic data (e.g., ethnicity, region, occupation) would focus on the needs of specific API sub communities who may be marginalized and underserved.
- Establish a fund for mental health education, training, access, and research for the API community. For research, specifically look at what is currently offered for APIs; assess their suitability and effectiveness determine what barriers to access exist, and other relevant recommendations.

BUSINESS AND TRADE

The VAAB recommends the following actions that are under the purview of the Secretary of Commerce and Trade:

- Lead the effort to obtain federal and state funds to deliver further specialized support for the very small business segment, including support with rent, payroll and loan repayments.
- Partner with community organizations to provide very small businesses with assistance in navigating available state and federal resources, completing applications, providing necessary reporting, accessing in-language information and instructional material.
- Identify additional pathways, programs and initiatives to improve economic opportunity for minority-owned small businesses in Virginia.
- In light of COVID-19, monitor the national political trends to decrease the U.S. dependence on imports for personal protective equipment and pharmaceuticals and reduce imports of other essential items. Be aware of the impact these trends may have on U.S. and Commonwealth relations with Asian nations.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

The VAAB recommends the following actions that are under the purview of the Secretary of the Commonwealth and Secretary of Administration:

- Work with the Governor’s Director of AAPI Outreach to identify and engage community organizations and other stakeholders across the API community in Virginia as early as possible in developing U.S. Census-related outreach and allocate funding and other resources to assist these entities in their efforts around the census.
- Expand access to the internet and other technology particularly among low-income, non-English speaking Virginia residents to improve their ability to participate in the U.S. Census and other aspects of civic life in Virginia.
- Require the Virginia Department of Elections to collect better data, especially with respect to the race, ethnicity, and non-English language preferences of Virginia residents, to enable such data to be used meaningfully for civic engagement-related outreach.
- Translate the Virginia Department of Elections’ Citizen Portal, as well as the paper voter registration and absentee ballot applications and the absentee ballot and instructions, into multiple Asian and other non-English languages.
- Invest in improving the statewide infrastructure for absentee voting, specifically the technology and staffing necessary for securely and reliably processing an unprecedented number of absentee ballots.

EDUCATION

The VAAB recommends the following actions that are under the purview of the Secretary of Education:

- Increase resources for API students experiencing COVID-19 related discrimination harassment [i.e., legal (filing complaint through school process), social and mental health (opportunity for affirmative support from counselor trained in this specific type of discrimination)]
- Survey the API community to collect accurate data on bullying, harassment, anti-Asian attacks during this pandemic, and needed supports for students and educators
- Convene a virtual summit with API, Latinx, Black Indigenous People of Color that would focus on recruiting diverse educator workforce, leadership development, and support network across the Commonwealth
- Convene an advisory body to review and revise SOL Social Studies standards to include API history and curriculum. Members should include VAAB Education committee members, Asian Studies educators and subject matter experts such as the 1882 Foundation.
- VDOE conducts a survey of needed ELL supports, for students, families and ELL educators.
- Execute an ELL “virtual” curriculum for newcomer immigrant parents and students with a focus on language and cultural competence

- Provide culturally and language-appropriate mental health resources for students at all levels of the K-12 and higher educational system that work through higher utilized channels of mental health help such as those within the religious community.
- Include plans to support ELL students in the \$750,000 set aside from the CARES Act for state-coordinated, evidence-based assessments of student social-emotional learning.

GENERAL BOARD MEETINGS

Since our December 2019 report, the VAAB held three meetings:

1. February 6, 2020 (Richmond, VA)
2. May 27, 2020 (Virtual)
3. June 30, 2020 (Virtual)

The VAAB achieved a quorum for each meeting.

As previously noted in previously submitted reports, the Commonwealth's Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) rules exacerbate the challenge of consistently achieving quorum because such rules require in-person meetings and generally prohibit Board member meeting participation through 21st century technology.

The VAAB has sought guidance from the Office of the Attorney General and understands that the balance between transparency in our Government and efficiency is often difficult to maintain. As the VAAB serves in an advisory capacity, it continues to be our hope that advisory boards be allowed to operate with working papers and committees that fall outside of FOIA regulations.

The following guest speakers shared expertise or experiences that support our purpose and focus areas. Such engagement also provides information to inform our annual report.

- Brian Ball, Secretary of Commerce and Trade, Commonwealth of VA
- Justin Bell, J.D., Assistant Attorney General, Office of the Attorney General, Commonwealth of VA
- Daniel Carey, M.D., Secretary of Health and Human Resources, Commonwealth of VA
- Maribel Castañeda, Director of Board Appointments, Commonwealth of VA
- Jae K Davenport, Deputy Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security, Commonwealth of VA
- Traci DeShazor, Deputy Secretary of the Commonwealth
- Marvin Figueroa, Legislative Director, Governor's Office of Policy and Legislative Affairs, Commonwealth of VA
- Keenon Hook, Division Commander, Virginia State Police
- Amy Lay, Policy Planning, Virginia State Police
- Norman Oliver, MD, MA, State Health Commissioner, Virginia Department of Health
- Matthew Patterson, Virginia State Police
- Atif Qarni, Secretary of Education, Commonwealth of VA
- Kelly Thomasson, Secretary of the Commonwealth of VA
- Keon Turner, Manager, Uniform Crime Reporting, Virginia State Police
- Janice Underwood, PhD, Chief Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer, Commonwealth of VA

OUTREACH AND FACT-FINDING ACTIVITIES

VAAB members also attended or engaged with the following organizations and their representatives to generate awareness of the VAAB's purpose or advance the VAAB and creation of this report.

- Laura Beldin - Senior Vice President, Bank of America
- Ron Brown - Partnership Director, US Census Bureau - Philadelphia Region
- Michael Cassidy - President, The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis
- Maya Castillo, Political Director, New Virginia Majority
- Bessie Chan-Smitham - Director of Community Engagement, Asian Americans Advancing Justice Center
- Christine Chen - Executive Director, APIAVote
- Mahmud Chowdhury - Chair, The Asian American Society of Central Virginia
- Kathy Dolan - Outreach Director, Virginia Department of Small Business and Supplier Diversity
- Marita Etcubanez - Director of Strategic Initiatives, Asian Americans Advancing Justice Center
- I-Mo Fu - Principal, Blacksburg Chinese School
- Nina Ha - Director, Asian Cultural Engagement Center at Virginia Tech
- Tracey Jeter - Director, Virginia Department of Small Business and Supplier Diversity
- Tim Joyce - CEO, YMCA of Greater Richmond
- Jody Keenan - State Director, Virginia Small Business Development Center
- Ashley Kenneth - Senior Vice President Policy and Legislative Affairs, The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis
- Emily May - Cofounder and Executive Director, Hollaback Trainings
- Terry Ao Minnis - Senior Director of Census and Voting Programs, Asian Americans Advancing Justice Center
- Petula Moy - President Emeritus, Asian Business Association of Hampton Roads
- Van Thanh Pham - Community Engagement Organizer, National Korean American Service & Education Consortium
- Laura Pho - Chair, Asian Americans Impacting Virginia
- Rita Pin Ahrens - Executive Director, OCA Asian Pacific American Advocates
- Tricia Puryear - Vice President of Social Responsibility and Strategic Partnerships, YMCA of Greater Richmond
- Sookyung Oh, D.C.-area Director, National Korean American Service & Education Consortium
- Laura Goren - Research Director, The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis
- Cindy Shao - Chair, Asian American Chamber of Commerce
- Chad Stewart - Manager, Education Policy and Development, The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis
- Pient Tran - Vice President, External Affairs & Government Relations, Capital One
- John Yang - President & CEO, Asian Americans Advancing Justice - DC
- Michel Zajur - President & CEO, Virginia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce

HEALTH COMMITTEE REPORT

Health disparities within the Asian and Pacific Islander (API) community have always existed, however the World Health Organization (WHO) classified global pandemic, COVID-19, highlighted the significant concerns of the Commonwealth's API community in the areas of data collection, policy, and practice. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the Virginia Health Department (VDH) have not prioritized the collection of data for APIs; therefore, during the pandemic, the needs of APIs were largely not addressed. However, not only are APIs a growing community in Virginia, API sub-communities often have different needs. Although APIs have commonalities, it is important to note that the API communities are not a monolithic group. Considering the health needs of API's have long been ignored in Virginia and that the health and mental health effects of COVID-19 may long outlast the pandemic, it is important for VAAB to not only educate, but also advocate for the health interests of API's by addressing how API data is collected and used.

Specifically, in Virginia, there are continuing and significant gaps in API data for COVID-19 cases. For the most efficient and effective care, medicine and public health are based on accurate, peer-reviewed, statistical analysis of harmonized, disaggregated data. Furthermore, race and ethnicity are commonly used predictor variables in understanding the effect of disease and health. However, in the early stages of the pandemic into Phase 2 of reopening, VDH did not require race to be reported. Virginia's data does not meet the standards set by the Council for State and Territorial Epidemiologists for standardized surveillance case definition and national notification for 2019 novel coronavirus disease. Whereas Virginia's neighboring states, Maryland, Kentucky, and North Carolina have prioritized race in their data.

Originally, Virginia Department of Health (VDH) only identified three categories for COVID-19 race data collection, white, black, and other (Virginia Department of Health, 2020). Furthermore, Virginia did not have data on over half of the cases as 55% of positive cases were listed as "other race". The data did not represent Virginia's population and would be considered sufficiently low quality when following basic research methods. In an effort to minimize health disparities, The Health Equity Working Group (HEWG), which included a representative from the VAAB Health Committee, revised the standard to COVID-19 and future crisis to include seven categories to be more representative of Virginia's population. The race categories included: Asian or Pacific Islander, Black, Latino, Native American, White, Other Race, and Two or More Races. Even though the updated category included API, it still lacked API subcommunities that may need additional support and resources. Furthermore, it also excludes the impact of Virginia's frontline healthcare workforce while responding to COVID-19. According to Virginia Healthcare Workforce data (Healthcare Workforce Data Center, n.d), API physicians represent 18% of the approximate 20,000 physicians, 5% of the 112,000 nurses, 5% of the 11,800 nurse practitioners, and 5% of the 4,300 respiratory therapists. Other frontline and essential workers, who have been called on to meet our basic needs during the COVID-19 shutdown, are disproportionately women, immigrants, Black, and/or Latinx. Emergency preparedness, response and recovery play a critical role in providing continuity of care to support all communities during a public health crisis and without accurate data, we limit their effectiveness and our ability to close disparity gaps. Under-

representation and exclusion of demographic and workforce data will not break the chain of health disparities.

Alongside the health disparities in the API community is the growing mental health concerns. Some of the concerns may also be compounded by the stigma of mental illness and psychotherapy in the API culture and culturally insensitive services such as language barriers and lack of cultural understanding. As a result, the U.S. Department of Health and Human services reported that only 17% of APIs seek treatment for mental health concerns (Abe-Ki, 2007).

Furthermore, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health, API females in grades 9-12 are 20% more likely to attempt suicide compared with non-Hispanic white female students and that Southeast Asian refugees are at risk for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) associated with trauma experienced before and after immigration to the U.S (Office of Minority Health, n.d.). Additionally, the American Psychological Association reports that suicide is the second-leading cause of death for APIs ages 15-34, which is consistent with the national data across all racial/ethnic groups and that those ages 20-24 have the highest suicide rate (12.44 per 100,000). APIs also have the highest suicide rate among women ages of 65 and 84 (American Psychological Association, n.d.).

As the COVID-19 pandemic originated in Wuhan, China, APIs have been scapegoated and blamed for being the cause of the outbreak. As a result, APIs have experienced a marked increase in incidences of discrimination, harassment and violence. For example, in the first eight weeks, 1,497 incidences of discrimination, including workplace discrimination were reported to the Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council (Asian Pacific Policy & Planning Council, 2020). Common incidents have included verbal harassment, shunning, bullying, and physical assault. A recent poll of over 1,000 adults conducted by Ipsos, a research and marketing company, on behalf of the Center for Public Integrity found that approximately 30% of Americans blame China or Chinese people for COVID-19, and approximately one-third (32%) of respondents have witnessed someone blaming Asians for the pandemic (Ellerbeck, 2020). Combined, these findings provide evidence of the increased discrimination APIs are currently experiencing in the U.S.

The growing acts of discrimination, which may last long after the pandemic ends, are concerning because a growing body of research indicates a link between racial discrimination and anxiety and depression. In a 2013 review of 121 studies on the effects of racism, researchers found that individuals who experienced discrimination were significantly more likely to suffer from mental health problems such as depression or anxiety (Priest et al., 2013). A 2007 study that surveyed 2,047 APIs identified racial discrimination as a significant predictor of mental health disorders over a 12-month period (Gee et al., 2007). Prior to the pandemic, API communities were already considered a high-risk group among mental health experts. However, a limitation with mental health research on APIs is that APIs are not fully represented in the research and that the research is generalized to all APIs without further cultural considerations. The lingering anti-Asian fears related to COVID-19, are rooted in deep-seated racism and miseducation. Documenting and addressing these incidences is an important step towards identifying ways to prevent future occurrences and protecting the API community.

Recommendations

- For Virginia to be a leader in health equity and be able to make sound public health policy, we must insist on high quality, accessible, and reliable disaggregated data that reflects Virginia's diverse and growing API demographics. In the past, the CDC and VDH have not adequately collected API data, however the API community is rapidly growing, and our needs should not be ignored. Therefore, APIs need to be included in data collection, disaggregation, and analysis for all health policy and practice. Additionally, collecting more specific demographic data (e.g., ethnicity, region, occupation) would focus on the needs of specific API sub communities who may be marginalized and underserved.
- Establish a fund for mental health education, training, access, and research for the API community. For research, specifically look at what is currently offered for APIs; assess their suitability and effectiveness determine what barriers to access exist, and other relevant recommendations.

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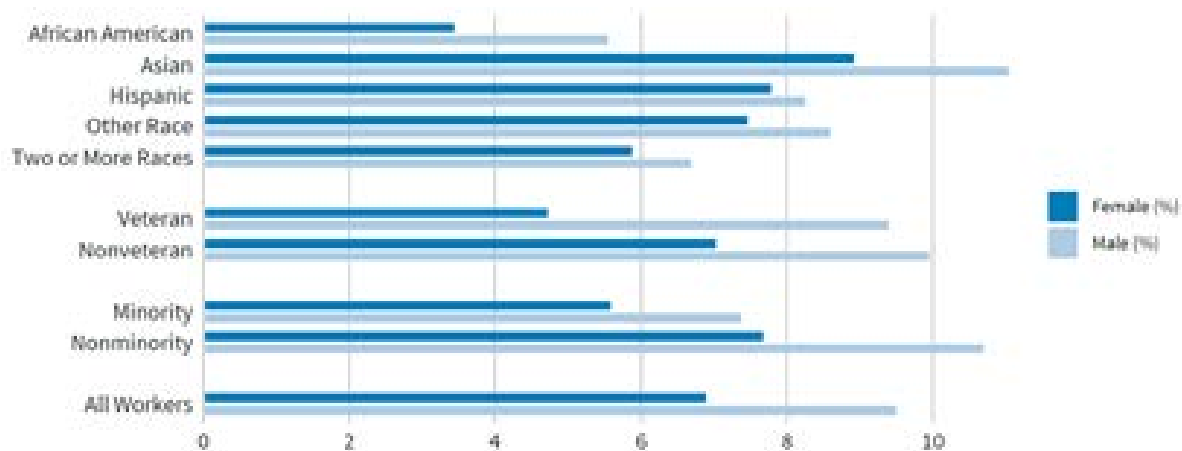
<https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/news/2020-news-releases/virginia-department-of-health-covid-19-dashboard-to-include-more-detailed-race-and-ethnicity-data-starting-today/>

BUSINESS AND TRADE COMMITTEE REPORT

Virginia's Very Small Businesses

There are 766,826 small businesses in Virginia, comprising 99.5% of Virginia businesses and 47.1% of Virginia employees are employed by the state's small businesses.¹ Small businesses are an engine of growth in the state, creating 39,397 net jobs in 2019. Amongst this group, the segment of firms employing fewer than 20 employees experienced the largest job gains, adding 29,300 net jobs.² Minority-owned businesses are a prevalent segment, particularly amongst the very small businesses, as well as amongst the self-employed in Virginia. Minority-owned businesses represent a large proportion of these smaller and self-employed ventures. APIs have the highest rates of self-employment amongst all minority groups, with rates that exceed those amongst Virginia's African American, Hispanic and other minority communities. This is true across both male and female owned API businesses. The most predominant sector for API businesses,³ based on national data, is food and accommodations, representing 24% of all API businesses and this is the sector reporting⁴ the highest negative impact from COVID-19 (amongst 18 sectors).

Virginia Self-Employment Rates by Gender and Demographic, 2018



Source: 2018 American Community Survey

¹ Statistics of US Small Businesses, <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/susb.html>

² Business Employment Dynamics, Bureau of Labor and Statistics.

³ Annual Business Survey, 2018.

⁴ National Small Business Pulse Survey, June 2020, <https://portal.census.gov/pulse/data/>

Imports

This pandemic has made clear to U.S. policy officials that the U.S. is dependent on foreign imports of items like personal protective equipment and pharmaceuticals deemed essential to the health needs of our populace. This has become a bipartisan issue because the pandemic has made very clear how dependent we are on imports from China and elsewhere in Asia of items essential to our national welfare that we no longer can produce domestically because we have offshored so much of our productive capabilities. This overhaul realization will likely influence the future composition and balance of our trading relations with China and other Asian countries.

The Trump Administration is considering a plan, proposed by White House economic adviser Peter Navarro, that will reduce this nation's dependence on imports and increase the domestic production of medical supplies and pharmaceuticals. Press reports are that the Trump Administration awarded a contract worth more than \$812 million to a new company in Virginia to produce health drugs and their ingredients in this country. The Virginia firm, Phlow, was founded in January and has described itself as a "public benefit pharmaceutical company." Its CEO, Dr. Eric Edwards, told the Associated Press that the company's mission was to make the U.S. less reliant on other countries for its drugs and their ingredients.

Former Vice President Biden, the Democratic candidate for President, released a plan on July 8th entitled "Rebuild U.S. Supply Chains and Ensure the U.S. Does Not Face Future Shortages of Critical Equipment." The Biden plan went beyond incentivizing the domestic production of medical supplies to also cover "semi- conductors, key electronics and related equipment, telecommunications infrastructure, and key raw materials."

On June 10,2020 Virginia's senior Senator Mark Warner, who is the ranking Democrat on the very important Senate Intelligence Committee joined GOP Senator John Cornyn in introducing a bill entitled "Creating Helpful Incentives to Produce Semiconductors (CHIPS) for America Act." The legislation would help restore semiconductor manufacturing back to American soil by increasing federal incentives to stimulate advanced chip manufacturing here. This is needed because as in the words of our Senator "semiconductors underpin all innovation today and are critical to U.S. communications and defense computing capabilities" A bipartisan bill with a similar objective was introduced by Democratic Leader Senator Schumer and GOP Senator Cotton. That bill would offer States \$15 billion in federal grants to build, expand or modernize domestic semiconductor and R&D facilities.

These sorts of bills, if enacted by Congress, are likely to give a boost to production of semiconductors at the Micron Technology Plant our Governor helped to attract to Manassas and which is helping create over 1100 new well-paying jobs for our populace and which will help create additional jobs in that area. They are part of a national movement to increase U.S exports to our trading partners so our balance of trade improves, and to re-shore the production of health items and other essential items domestically.

Our officials in the Commonwealth need to be cognizant of these national political trends.

Recommendations

- While the Paycheck Protection Program, the Economic Injury and Disaster Loan and Advance programs, and the Main Street Lending Program offer relief, they are designed for the entire segment of small businesses up to 500 employees. Even the Small, Women-owned, and Minority-owned Business (SWaM) Microloan program is for the range of businesses up to 250 employees. There is only sporadic locality-specific relief for the very smallest of businesses. The Secretary of Commerce and Trade needs to lead the effort to obtain federal and state funds to deliver further specialized support for the very small business segment, including support with rent, payroll and loan repayments. Specialized partner agencies, such as the Small Business Development Centers in Virginia, the department of Small Business and Supplier Diversity, and the Virginia Small Business Financing Authority, need to be engaged by the Administration to deliver to this segment of businesses. This is of particular importance to Virginia's AAPI community.
- Partner with community organizations, such as the Asian Business Association of Hampton Roads, Asian Chamber of Commerce, Asian Business Owners Association, Virginia Asian Chamber of Commerce, to provide very small businesses with assistance in navigating available state and federal resources, completing applications, providing necessary reporting, accessing in-language information and instructional material. This support can be delivered by community organizations, but many will need to raise financial and in-kind resources to deliver. The Secretary of Commerce and Trade, in amassing resources for COVID-relief to businesses, needs to also ensure there are funds available to engage community organizations to support very small businesses who lack the sophistication and in-house ability to apply for relief. This will likely require partner grants to community organizations to help very small businesses from the AAPI community to access the relief called for in this recommendation.
- In the medium term, identify additional pathways, programs and initiatives to improve economic opportunity for minority-owned small businesses in Virginia. The Commonwealth's 2020 Disparity Study, currently in progress, is assessing barriers faced by woman-and minority-owned businesses and it is a good first step as it is compiling a data-based picture of the current state of affairs in Virginia. The VAAB stands ready to support the study by connecting those working on it to AAPI communities to ensure AAPI experiences are reflected in the study. More importantly, the VAAB and its network of community organizations can play an active role in the administration's follow-up recommendations, especially the design and implementation of programs and initiatives to support minority-owned small businesses in Virginia.
- In light of COVID-19, monitor the national political trends to decrease the U.S. dependence on imports for personal protective equipment and pharmaceuticals and reduce imports of other essential items. Be aware of the impact these trends may have on U.S. and Commonwealth relations with Asian nations.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE REPORT

In many ways, the coronavirus outbreak has been disruptive and instructive in getting APIs and other Virginia residents to respond to the census and participate in upcoming elections.

The outbreak has intensified civic engagement-related problems⁵ that already exist – including language and other cultural barriers and unequal access to technology – and further confirmed the importance of strategies to overcome these problems. New issues, such as the increased volume of absentee ballots due to the outbreak, have also arisen, suggesting a need to think more proactively about dealing with similar issues in the future.

2020 Census

As detailed in the Civic Engagement Committee’s 2019 report, the United States Census, conducted every ten years, is “critical to Virginia,” in that the household data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau forms “the basis for per capita federal funding, representational apportionment, and private sector business spending.”⁶ As D.C.-area director of the National Korean American Service & Education Consortium (“NAKASEC”) Sookyung Oh puts it, the census “really just drives so many decisions” that affect the lives of Virginia residents, including APIs.⁷

Between March 12 and March 20 of this year, households were notified about the census.⁸ Unlike in past years, the U.S. Census Bureau moved to a predominantly online system for the 2020 Census (my2020census.gov), while still offering, as an alternative, the option of responding by phone or by mail.⁹ By the April 1st Census Day, nearly 90% of self-responses received by the U.S. Census Bureau nationwide and in Virginia were online.¹⁰

However, due to the coronavirus, the first case of which was reported in Virginia around that same time,¹¹ many of the original plans to reach out to Virginia residents about the 2020 Census either

⁵ It is worth noting that the coronavirus outbreak has intensified problems for the API community in other areas as well, such as public health disparities.

⁶ Virginia Asian Advisory Board, 2019 Annual Report at 31, <https://www.vaab.virginia.gov/media/governorvirginiagov/vaab/files/VAAB-Annual-Report-Dec-2019-FINAL.pdf>. For instance, in terms of federal funding for critical services furnished to Virginia residents, the undercounting of any single individual during the census “equates to a loss of roughly \$2,000 per year, or roughly \$20,000 in funds over the 10-year period,” which the state would be forced to make up for with its own revenue. *Id.*

⁷ Interview by Justin Lo with Sookyung Oh, D.C.-Area Director, NAKASEC by telephone (June 22, 2020) (“NAKASEC Interview”) (recording on file). NAKASEC is an organization with an office in Virginia that focuses on issues of social, economic, and racial justice for Korean and Asian Americans, <https://nakasec.org>.

⁸ United States Census 2020, <https://2020census.gov>.

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Id.* Total national and Virginia response rates, as of April 1, were 41.3% and 46.8%, respectively. Online response rates, nationally and in Virginia, were 36.5% and 41.5%, respectively.

¹¹ John Boyer, Timeline: A Look at How Coronavirus News Developed & Quickly Escalated in Virginia, Richmond Times Dispatch (Mar. 24, 2020), https://www.richmond.com/special-report/coronavirus/timeline-a-look-at-how-coronavirus-news-developed-and-quickly-escalated-in-virginia/article_bcd6def-41d7-56d5-a936-316709704d17.html.

fell by the wayside or were sharply curtailed. This, in turn, has had a major impact on census response rates. According to political director of New Virginia Majority (“NVM”) Maya Castillo, Virginia’s census self-response rate toward the end of June was several percentage points lower than it was during the 2010 Census (66% in 2020 versus 69% in 2010) and showed only marginal increases month-over-month, as opposed to whole percentage point increases.¹²

Among other things, during the outbreak, door-to-door canvassing, typically done in March, was no longer feasible. Canvassers would have been able to guide Virginia residents in real-time through the online process of responding to the census on their personal devices, as well as to answer any questions they might have, such as concerns about government access to their personal information and other data privacy issues and confusion over the so-called “citizenship question.”¹³ This is why, as Oh points out, organizations like NAKASEC and NVM usually “invest so heavily in the door-to-door.”¹⁴

The outbreak further restricted other meaningful avenues for addressing questions and concerns about the census. The COVID-19-related closure of community gathering spaces precluded APIs or other members of the same community from regularly engaging with and receiving census-related information from other trusted members of their community. In-person outreach events at faith institutions, senior centers, shopping malls, and other public spaces, at which such information could be disseminated, were canceled as well.¹⁵

It was also impossible, because of the outbreak, to open census assistance centers at libraries, offices, and other physical locations around Virginia, originally planned from April to June. The census assistance centers, much like door-to-door canvassing, would have given Virginia residents with limited internet access or technological ability an opportunity to obtain the access and support needed to complete their responses online.¹⁶

Though households unable to respond online received paper questionnaires in the mail from the U.S. Census Bureau in mid-April, those questionnaires were available exclusively in English and in Spanish.¹⁷ Only the online and telephonic systems were accessible in languages other than

¹² Interview by Justin Lo with Maya Castillo, Political Director, NVM by telephone (June 24, 2020) (“NVM Interview”) (recording on file). NVM is an organization dedicated to working-class communities of color in Virginia that engages in voter organizing and other community organizing, <https://www.newvirginiamajority.org>.

¹³ NVM Interview; NAKASEC Interview. As Oh notes, even though the Supreme Court ruled against the inclusion of the “citizenship question” on the census, many immigrants, particularly in the API community, still worry about being asked their citizenship status. Their lingering concerns are not unfounded. In fact, on July 21, 2020, the White House issued a memorandum indicating that the federal government would seek to exclude “aliens who are not in a lawful immigration status” from 2020 Census results for purposes of congressional reapportionment. President Donald J. Trump, Memorandum on Excluding Illegal Aliens from the Apportionment Base Following the 2020 Census (July 21, 2020), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/memorandum-excluding-illegal-aliens-apportionment-base-following-2020-census/>.

¹⁴ NAKASEC Interview.

¹⁵ NVM Interview; NAKASEC Interview.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ United States Census 2020, <https://2020census.gov>.

English or Spanish, specifically Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, Russian, Arabic, Tagalog, Polish, French, Haitian Creole, Portuguese, and Japanese.¹⁸

In this sense, low-income, non-English speaking residents, including APIs, with limited or no access to the internet were disproportionately disadvantaged by the absence of door-to-door canvassing and census assistance centers in the time of COVID-19. According to Asian and Pacific Islander American Vote (“APIAVote”), approximately 38% of APIs in Virginia are less than proficient in English, and 7% reportedly live in poverty.¹⁹

This is not to say that community organizations and other stakeholders – whose independently-funded efforts have always been critical in driving civic engagement among API and other underrepresented communities in Virginia – did not find ways to pivot their efforts around the 2020 Census in response to the coronavirus outbreak. In lieu of in-person activities like door-to-door canvassing, census assistance centers, and outreach events, the efforts shifted mainly to phone banking, text messaging, and mailers.²⁰ Informational ads around the census were placed on the radio and other digital forms of ethnic media, rather than in printed newspapers.²¹

NAKASEC, for example, made the switch in May. The organization had been doing door-to-door canvassing for the first two weeks in March but decided thereafter to suspend those activities in light of the pandemic. Through the hiring of translators and staff members conversant in other languages, which required considerable funding, the organization invested in a “multipronged, multilingual approach” involving phone banking, text messaging, and in-language postcards mailed to API households.²² NAKASEC also awarded grants to five partner organizations that otherwise lacked the resources to successfully pivot on their own.²³

However, there were significant constraints on the effectiveness of phone banking and text messaging as primary strategies for reaching Virginia residents about the 2020 Census. As is generally the case, contact rates by phone or text, as opposed to door-to-door canvassing, were lower. It was also difficult to ensure that a person who committed over the phone or by text to filling out their census form would actually do so.²⁴

Furthermore, the phone numbers available to stakeholders such as NAKASEC and NVM came from the Virginia Department of Elections.²⁵ As such, the pool of Virginia residents that could be

¹⁸ *Id.* Interestingly, the U.S. Census Bureau made informational materials and guides available in 59 non-English languages, but only made the online system for responding to the 2020 Census available in 12 non-English languages.

¹⁹ APIAVote, 2020 State Factsheet: Virginia (“APIAVote Factsheet”) at 2, <https://www.apiavote.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/Virginia-2020.pdf>. Oh reports that 19% of Virginia residents are not proficient in English.

²⁰ NVM Interview; NAKASEC Interview.

²¹ NAKASEC Interview.

²² *Id.*

²³ *Id.* With funding from NAKASEC, Chinese American Community Health Services, one of the partner organizations, was able to spearhead a campaign to distribute information about the 2020 Census through WeChat.

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ NVM Interview; NAKASEC Interview.

reached by phone or text were limited to registered voters who had voluntarily reported their phone numbers to the Department of Elections – which presumed a certain ability and willingness to engage in government-directed activities.²⁶ Those who do not typically participate in government-directed activities, such as the census, were less likely to have been contacted.

Moreover, whereas other states collect registered voter data disaggregated on the basis of race and ethnicity, the Virginia Department of Elections does not. Based on the phone numbers from the Department of Elections, therefore, there was no way to discern the race or ethnicity of any registered voter or whether that voter required language assistance. Attempts were made to disaggregate the phone numbers – such as by using the “Voter Activation Network Database” to guess a voter’s race or ethnicity or by cross-referencing the numbers with household addresses from third-party vendors to target areas with a higher density of APIs and other underrepresented persons and lower census response rates.²⁷ But these attempts were imperfect at best.

As of the writing of this report, government-employed census takers, or enumerators, have been deployed. The enumerators may wind up catching many of the households unable to access or otherwise figure out how to respond to the 2020 Census. But without in-person efforts by non-governmental stakeholders, it still may be impossible to reach those households that declined to respond to the census due to their reluctance to interact with the government. Other households may choose not to answer their doors for anyone, including the enumerators, simply because of COVID-19-related health concerns.²⁸

At the end of late August, Virginia’s self-response rate was 69.3%, nearly five percentage points higher than the national self-response rate of 64.7%:

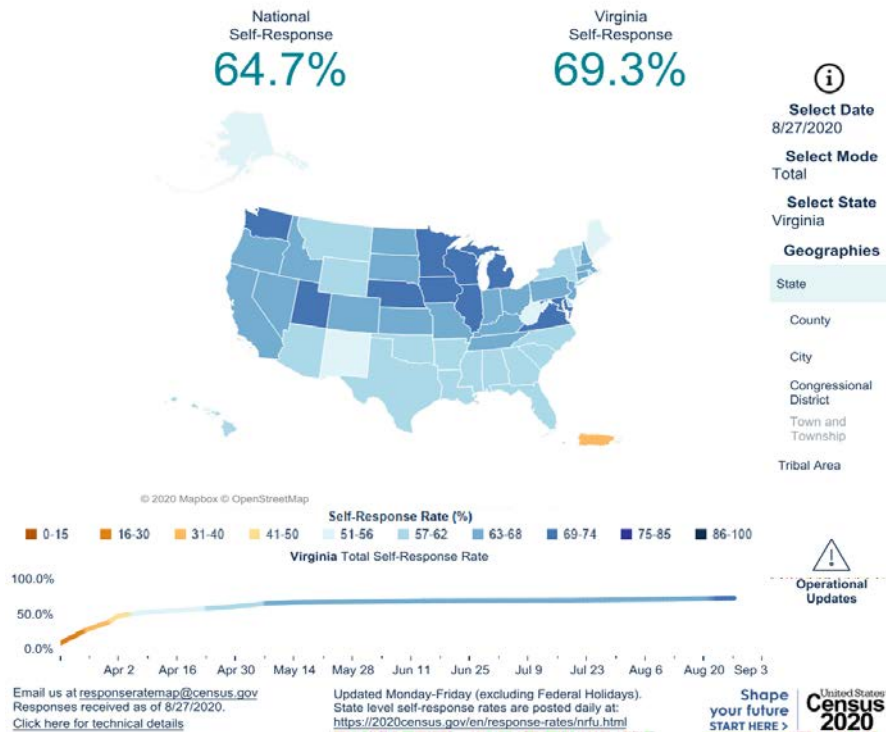
²⁶ NVM Interview.

²⁷ NAKASEC Interview.

²⁸ NVM Interview; NAKASEC Interview.

2020 Census Self-Response by State

This map features self-response rates from households that responded to the 2020 Census online, by mail, or by phone. Rates can be viewed in [rankings here](#).



Still, in the end, as Castillo predicts, “a lot of people won’t be captured [by the 2020 Census]. We already know this. Even with Virginia being above the national average for people who are counted, it won’t be enough.”²⁹ At the same time, had no steps been taken to pivot Virginia’s census-related outreach efforts in response to the coronavirus outbreak, its impact would have been far more severe and devastating than it already has been.³⁰

Recommendations

- Work with the Governor’s Director of AAPI Outreach to identify and engage community organizations and other stakeholders across the API community in Virginia as early as possible in developing U.S. Census-related outreach and allocate funding³¹ and other resources to assist these entities in their efforts around the census.

²⁹ NVM Interview.

³⁰ NAKASEC Interview.

³¹ The Governor was previously able to allocate \$1.5 million from the state’s Economic Contingency Fund for the 2020 Census and should continue to utilize this and other available sources of funding. Virginia Office of the Governor, Press Release: Governor Northam Announces Virginia To Dedicate Additional Funding for 2020 Census (July 23, 2019), <https://www.governor.virginia.gov/newsroom/all-releases/2019/july/headline-841770-en.html>.

- Expand access to the internet and other technology particularly among low-income, non-English speaking Virginia residents to improve their ability to participate in the U.S. Census and other aspects of civic life in Virginia.
- Require the Virginia Department of Elections to collect better data, especially with respect to the race, ethnicity, and non-English language preferences of Virginia residents, to enable such data to be used meaningfully for civic engagement-related outreach.

Elections

Virginia, unlike many other states, holds elections every year – with elections for federal offices in even-numbered years and elections for state and local offices in odd-numbered years.³² Primary elections for those offices are scheduled for the second Tuesday in June, and general elections take place on the Tuesday after the first Monday in November.³³ This means that Virginia residents – along with relevant government agencies, community organizations, and other stakeholders – are regularly asked to participate in the electoral process, in some form or another. As it stands, even without the coronavirus outbreak, the ability to sustain continued engagement among Virginia residents remains a challenge. Many Virginia residents generally tend to skip off-year elections (e.g., in 2019) that do not involve gubernatorial and other statewide offices.³⁴

APIAVote reports that, from 2012 to 2018, the number of eligible API voters in Virginia grew by 37%, as compared to the statewide growth rate of 6%.³⁵ There are now as many as 357,908 APIs eligible to vote in Virginia.³⁶ Yet, in part because they are less likely to be contacted about participating in elections,³⁷ APIs reportedly have among the lowest voter turnout rates of any racial or ethnic group in the country.³⁸

The coronavirus outbreak has added to existing challenges in terms of participation in elections in ways that further disadvantage APIs and other underrepresented communities in Virginia. Castillo reports that, from January to June of this year, Virginia voter registration was down 32% as compared to the same six-month period in 2016, a fact that she attributes directly to the

³² Fairfax County Office of Elections, Election Schedule 2020, <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/elections/ecalendar>; City of Lexington Voter Registrar, Election Information, http://lexingtonva.gov/gov/depts/voter_registrar/election_information.htm.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Why These 5 States Hold Odd-Year Elections, Bucking the Trend, NPR (Nov. 4, 2019), <https://www.npr.org/2019/11/04/767959274/why-these-5-states-hold-odd-year-elections-bucking-the-trend>.

³⁵ APIAVote Factsheet at 1.

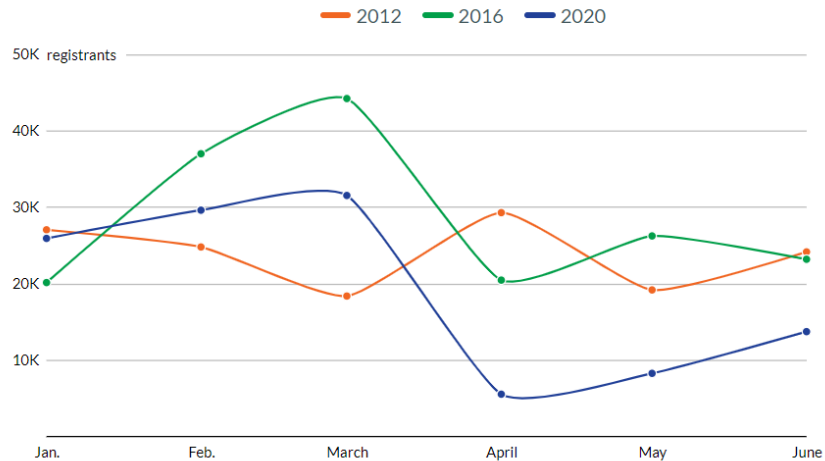
³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ *Id.* at 2. According to APIAVote, in 2018, “50% of Asian Americans received no contact or were unsure if they received contact about the election from the Democratic party and 60% reported the same from the GOP.”

³⁸ Saahil Desai, The Untapped Potential of the Asian Voter, Washington Monthly (April/May/June 2018), <https://washingtonmonthly.com/magazine/april-may-june-2018/the-untapped-potential-of-the-asian-voter/>.

outbreak.³⁹ Indeed, as reported by the Virginia Public Access Project,⁴⁰ there was a significant downturn in registration this year, specifically in the first three months after the outbreak (April, May, and June), as compared to 2012 and 2016:

New Voter Registrations, January through June



Source: Virginia Department of Elections

Among other things, the outbreak led to the suspension of in-person activities to register Virginia residents to vote in upcoming elections and educate them about changes in voting laws that would expand and facilitate their ability to vote.⁴¹ Outreach efforts, such as door-to-door canvassing and site-based voter registration programs at high schools, community centers, food banks, and other places were cancelled. And Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles (“DMV”) offices, where many Virginia residents go to register to vote or update their voter registration,⁴² were closed temporarily.⁴³

In addition, across the state, there has been a dramatic increase in demand for absentee ballots, given that many Virginia residents would prefer to avoid going in-person to a polling station during

³⁹ NVM Interview.

⁴⁰ Virginia Public Access Project, Without DMV, Voter Registrations Lag (July 21, 2020), <https://www.vpap.org/visuals/visual/voter-registrations-through-june2020/>; see also Justin Mattingly, Fewer People Are Registering To Vote in Virginia as Coronavirus Blocks Efforts, Richmond Times Dispatch (July 24, 2020), https://richmond.com/news/virginia/fewer-people-are-registering-to-vote-in-virginia-as-coronavirus-blocks-efforts/article_dbccd791-b68b-50f8-a340-074e81ed4320.html.

⁴¹ NVM Interview; NAKASEC Interview.

⁴² Virginia Department of Elections, Election & Voter FAQ, <https://www.elections.virginia.gov/registration/election-voter-faq/>. According to Castillo, within the first two years after Virginia allowed its residents to register to vote through the DMV, the DMV assisted approximately 54% (approximately 3 million out of 5.6 million) of all registered voters.

⁴³ Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles, DMV Customer Service Centers To Remain Closed Until At Least May 11 (Apr. 24, 2020), https://www.dmv.virginia.gov/general/news/pressReleases/#/News_Article:14020.

the outbreak.⁴⁴ This has been facilitated by the fact that, due to the outbreak, the Governor's Administration allowed Virginia residents to use reason 2A ("my disability or illness") as an excuse on their absentee ballot application for this June's primary election.⁴⁵ The state will likely continue seeing record-high numbers of absentee ballots, since, as of July 1, a new law permitting no-excuse absentee ballot applications will formally go into effect.⁴⁶ There remains some question of whether state and local agencies have the infrastructure needed to reliably process this unprecedented surge in absentee ballots.⁴⁷

In response to the outbreak, there were pivots to "lit drops" of in-language informational materials to certain households, followed by phone calls and text messages, in order to educate and answer any questions from Virginia residents about registering to vote, applying for an absentee ballot, and voting more generally.⁴⁸ Overall, these strategies proved less effective and more resource-intensive than door-to-door canvassing and other in-person outreach efforts.⁴⁹

While Virginia residents were still able to register to vote, apply for an absentee ballot, and access voting-related information online, that functionality, as before, was available almost exclusively in English. Under Section 203 of the federal Voting Rights Act, neither the state itself, nor any locality other than Fairfax County⁵⁰ is legally required to provide language access with respect to voting. This, in turn, has contributed to an overwhelming lack of political will to improve such access.

The Virginia Department of Elections, for one, has made voting-related information on its website available in English and only three non-English languages: Spanish, Vietnamese, and Korean. The Department of Elections' Citizen Portal by which Virginia residents register to vote, update their voter registration, or apply for an absentee ballot remains in English only, unlike other states

⁴⁴ Alex Perry, More Absentee Ballots for Virginia Primary Voters, Virginia Gazette (June 26, 2020), <https://www.dailypress.com/virginiagazette/va-vg-primary-results-0627-20200626-ejpqt7k2qjhwxc6f2g3x5e-story.html>; Blake Lipton, Virginia Election Officials Seeing Significant Increase in Absentee Voting, Ramping Up Sanitation & Protective Measures, WJHL.com (May 14, 2020), <https://www.wjhl.com/news/your-local-election-hq/virginia-election-officials-seeing-significant-increase-in-absentee-voting-ramping-up-sanitation-and-protective-measures/>.

⁴⁵ Virginia Office of the Governor, Press Release: Governor Northam Postpones Upcoming May Elections in Response to COVID-19 (Apr. 24, 2020), <https://www.governor.virginia.gov/newsroom/all-releases/2020/april/headline-856329-en.html>.

⁴⁶ Justin Mattingly & Andrew Cain, Virginia Officials Prepare for Surge in Mail-in Voting After Practice Is Used Widely in Municipal Elections, Richmond Times-Dispatch (May 23, 2020), https://www.richmond.com/news/virginia/virginia-officials-prepare-for-surge-in-mail-in-voting-after-practice-is-used-widely-in/article_7dc226e1-9e77-5d27-9c8c-de63ee9d072c.html.

⁴⁷ NVM Interview; see also Wendy Weiser, To Protect Democracy, Expand Vote By Mail, Newsweek (June 18, 2020), <https://www.newsweek.com/protect-democracy-expand-vote-mail-opinion-1511996>; Michael Wines, Voting By Mail Could Be What States Need. But Can They Pull It Off?, New York Times (Apr. 11, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/11/us/coronavirus-voting-by-mail-elections.html>.

⁴⁸ NVM Interview; NAKASEC Interview.

⁴⁹ NVM Interview.

⁵⁰ NVM Interview; NAKASEC Interview. Fairfax County is only required to provide language access in Spanish and Vietnamese. Its website appears to provide such access through a function powered by Google Translate, instead of using actual certified translations in those languages.

that have translated their online portals into multiple languages.⁵¹ Furthermore, the absentee ballot and instructions themselves are not in-language either.⁵²

In other words, what continues to persist is an electoral process in Virginia that disproportionately impedes the ability of API and other underrepresented communities to participate in elections, by limiting language access in terms of voter registration, absentee voting, and voting-related information.⁵³ The coronavirus outbreak merely highlighted these access problems, in that in-person voter registration and education outreach efforts were suddenly thwarted due to the outbreak and the need for absentee voting unexpectedly increased. But these problems have always existed.

Recommendations

- Translate the Virginia Department of Elections' Citizen Portal, as well as the paper voter registration and absentee ballot applications and the absentee ballot and instructions, into multiple Asian and other non-English languages.
- Invest in improving the statewide infrastructure for absentee voting, specifically the technology and staffing⁵⁴ necessary for securely and reliably processing an unprecedented number of absentee ballots.
- Require the Virginia Department of Elections to collect better data, especially with respect to the race, ethnicity, and non-English language preferences of Virginia residents, to enable such data to be used meaningfully for civic engagement-related outreach.

⁵¹ Virginia Department of Elections, Citizen Portal, <https://vote.elections.virginia.gov/VoterInformation>; see also NVM Interview; NAKASEC Interview. Virginia residents may also register to vote or apply for an absentee ballot by mail, but again the paper forms are only in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Korean. Virginia Department of Elections, Voter Forms, <https://www.elections.virginia.gov/registration/voter-forms/>.

⁵² NVM Interview; NAKASEC Interview.

⁵³ As stated above, 38% of APIs in Virginia are less than proficient in English.

⁵⁴ "For states that rely mostly on polling places, adapting to mail voting means a sea change in equipment and planning. Tasks like printing and tabulating ballots that can be spread over local election offices when people vote in person become more demanding, and often more centralized, when elections are conducted by mail. ... States where voters' ballots are fed by hand into scanners at every precinct would now have to buy high-speed scanners to tabulate ballots, and probably move most counting to a central location to save money. People would have to be hired and trained to process ballots and verify [a] vast number of signatures." Wines, *Voting By Mail*, *supra*. Those states should also consider investing in "a number of powerful tools to ensure the security of mail ballots—tools that have been honed over time and enhanced by new technologies, including the mail ballot secrecy envelope, verification of signatures and personal information, bar codes, secure drop-off locations and drop boxes and post-election audits." Weiser, *To Protect Democracy*, *supra*.

Conclusion

The coronavirus outbreak and its impact on API participation in the 2020 Census and recent elections not only illuminate problems and support specific recommendations for addressing those problems. They also highlight the need for more sustained and active engagement between the Governor's Administration and the API community.

As such, the Civic Engagement Committee would finally recommend that the Governor look for ways to maximize the role of the Director of AAPI Outreach and install other API representatives in the Administration, in order to further support and advocate for, strengthen ties to, and build relationships of trust with the API community. Such sustained and active engagement by the Governor's Administration will cultivate a more robust sense of civic engagement among APIs across Virginia.

EDUCATION COMMITTEE REPORT

Anti-Asian Sentiment

Sociological research and national survey reports find that API students encounter experiences of discrimination based on national origin, race, color, and religion in the school setting, by their peers and by adults in positions of authority. Virginia is no exception. With the alarming rise of COVID-19 related discrimination and harassment targeted towards individuals of Asian descent, we expect that it will likely play out in schools when they safely reopen. For this reason, it is critical for educators and administrative leaders to be aware, mindful, and attentive to API students' experiences and take affirmative steps to prevent and deter the potential for discrimination and harassment related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

API Mental Health/Suicide Prevention/Adverse Childhood Trauma

Given the diversity of APIs (there are approximately 43 different ethnic subgroups who speak more than 100 languages and dialects), the task of providing age-appropriate mental health resources in a culturally- and language-appropriate manner can seem daunting. Relatively limited knowledge of mental health issues, needs, and resources, compounded by the fact that a few epidemiological studies have included APIs and other limited-English Americans have been undertaken, and a lower prevalence of reporting of mental health concerns by APIs make this issue difficult to parse. In fact, rather than shining a bright light on untreated mental health issues in API students, the Virginia Tech shooting left an unremarkable mark on the need to address the mental health needs of API students.

The 2005 study called *Model Minority at Risk: Expressed Needs of Mental Health by Asian American Young Adults*, looked at obtaining and discussing in-depth information on mental health problems, including the status, barriers, and potential solutions in 1.5 and 2nd generation Asian American young adults, including pressure to meet parental expectations of high academic achievement and live up to the "model minority" stereotype; difficulty of balancing two different cultures and communicating with parents; family obligations based on the strong family values; and discrimination or isolation due to racial or cultural background, as the most common stressors for API students. This study also found that API students tend not to seek professional help for their mental health problems. Instead they use personal support networks—close friends, significant others, and religious community. With Virginia's student population out of school during the COVID-19 pandemic, the need to invest in resources that work in tandem with these personal support networks is more important than ever given that students have not been able to access these networks during the pandemic.

Among the many mental health issues that API students experience, the suicide rate among APIs is alarmingly high. The 2005 CDC's *10 Leading Causes of Death* highlights significant mental health disparities among racial and ethnic groups. This study found that among 15 to 24-year-old females, APIs have the highest rate of suicides (14.1%) compared to other racial and ethnic groups (White 9.3%, Black 3.3%, and Hispanic 7.4%). API males in the same age range have

the second highest rate of suicides (12.7%) compared to other racial/ethnic group males in the same age range (White 17.5%, Black 6.7%, and Hispanic 10%).

According to the CDC's Office of Minority Health:

- 18.9 percent of API high school students report considering suicide, versus 15.5 percent of whites.
- 10.8 percent of API high school students report having attempted suicide, versus 6.2 percent of whites.
- API high school females are twice as likely (15 percent) to have attempted suicide than males (7 percent).
- Suicide death rates are 30 percent higher for 15 to 24-year-old API females than they are for white females (5.3 versus 4.0).
- Suicide death rates for 65+ year old API females are higher than they are for white females (4.8 to 4.5).

Diversify Education Workforce Leadership Pathway

Prior to the outbreak, the VAAB Education Committee invited API students and educators from both K-12 and higher education to meet with the VAAB board and share their insights and experiences. A theme emerging from those efforts was the systemic lack of support and culturally relevant resources to address issues of importance to the API community generally and more specifically, experiences of discrimination and marginalization faced by API students and educators. The lack of relevant curriculum materials that celebrate the contributions of APIs and the struggles for equality and freedom should be addressed by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE).

The proposed budget allocations to increase English Language Learners (ELL) support and increase the number of school counselors would have been welcome and incremental first steps toward creating a support structure within which to address some aspects of K-12 API student experience. The suspension of these budget items unfortunately comes at a time when such expenditure would have been both relevant and impactful within the API student and educator community.

COVID-19 has been exploited to surface and fuel anti-Asian sentiment and exposed more acutely the inadequacy of the current system to help API students and educators navigate the risks associated with increasing and targeted discrimination. Underinvestment in these areas undermine the long-term potential of API students and educators as they return to classrooms and administrative systems that were already ill-equipped to address issues of marginalization.

We are at a crucial moment in time to diversify our public education workforce by growing the base of APIs to better reflect our student demographics in Virginia. Addressing education professionals' compensation would be a starting point to attract and retain a diverse workforce to our public schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increase resources for API students experiencing COVID-19 related discrimination harassment [i.e., legal (filing complaint through school process), social and mental health (opportunity for affirmative support from counselor trained in this specific type of discrimination)]
- Survey the API community to collect accurate data on bullying, harassment, anti-Asian attacks during this pandemic, and needed supports for students and educators
- Convene a virtual summit with API, Latinx, Black Indigenous People of Color that would focus on recruiting diverse educator workforce, leadership development, and support network across the Commonwealth
- Convene an advisory body to review and revise SOL Social Studies standards to include API history and curriculum. Members should include VAAB Education committee members, Asian Studies educators and subject matter experts such as the 1882 Foundation.
- VDOE conducts a survey of needed ELL supports, for students, families and ELL educators.
- Execute an ELL “virtual” curriculum for newcomer immigrant parents and students with a focus on language and cultural competence
- Provide culturally and language-appropriate mental health resources for students at all levels of the K-12 and higher educational system that work through higher utilized channels of mental health help such as those within the religious community.
- Include plans to support ELL students in the \$750,000 set aside from the CARES Act for state-coordinated, evidence-based assessments of student social-emotional learning.