

Anti-Asian hate crimes bill passes U.S. Congress



Representative Grace Meng was the lead sponsor of anti-Asian hate crime legislation in the House of Representatives [File: Jeenah Moon/Reuters]

Washington, May 19 (RHC)-- The U.S. House of Representatives has approved legislation to combat the rise of hate crimes against Asians during the coronavirus pandemic, sending the bill to President Joe Biden on Tuesday for his signature.

The measure, previously passed in the Senate, was approved by an overwhelming majority in the House, 364-62. The new law directs the U.S. Justice Department to focus on the prosecution of violent crimes

against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

During the past year, U.S. police have seen a surge in racially motivated crimes against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders including a shooting in March in Georgia that killed six women of Asian descent.

“For more than a year, Asian Americans all across our nation have been screaming out for help,” Representative Grace Meng, lead sponsor of the bill, said in a statement. “We’ve all heard the sickening stories and seen the horrifying videos of Asian Americans being beaten, slashed and spat on,” Meng said when the bill passed the Senate by a 94-1 vote.

Law enforcement and Asian American advocates have linked the rise in hate crimes against Asians to the political rhetoric of former President Donald Trump and other Republican politicians who blamed the pandemic on China.

Hate crimes are notoriously difficult to prosecute. The bill provides for a hotline for local prosecutors seeking guidance in such cases and training for law enforcement. It also includes the Jabara-Heyer “NO HATE” Act, which improves law enforcement reporting of hate crimes and expands community assistance and resources for victims of such crimes.

The Act is named after Khalid Jabara, a Lebanese American who was killed by a racist neighbour in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 2016, and Heather Heyer, who died in a vehicle attack during a march by white supremacists in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017. Both attacks were initially not categorised as hate crimes but would be under the new law.

In California and New York, homes to large Asian American populations, there have been alarming incidents of violence against people of Asian descent. In March, a 75-year-old, Asian American man, Pak Ho, died after being shoved to the ground while taking a morning walk near his home in Oakland. A suspect faces assault charges but not a hate crime charge.

In New York, a 65-year-old Filipino woman was assaulted in broad daylight while walking on the street by a man who kicked her in the stomach and stomped on her head. The incident was captured on security video. She survived and he was arrested.

Last year, an Asian immigrant and his two young sons were stabbed and slashed while shopping for groceries in Midland, Texas. The monitoring group, Stop AAPI Hate, reported 3,795 incidents nationwide between March 2020 and February 2021.

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