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APABA Calls for Unity and Denounces Use of Xenophobic Language to Describe COVID-19

While we commend our elected leaders for taking steps to protect Americans during the COVID-19 crisis, the Asian Pacific American Bar Association of South Florida (APABA) denounces—and is deeply troubled by—the use of language with xenophobic undertones to describe a virus that affects all citizens around the world. The effects of these unfortunate remarks are far reaching and potentially dangerous.

When President Donald Trump calls COVID-19 the “Chinese virus” and Senator John Cornyn of Texas makes misleading comments generalizing the Chinese culture, such remarks stigmatize the Chinese and Asian American communities and divide Americans rather than unite them in a time of great adversity. As the World Health Organization has previously recognized, the use of such terms further stigmatizes minority groups and endangers public health. These effects are readily seen as news reports reveal a rise in anti-Asian bias and racist acts that lay blame for COVID-19 on individuals based on ethnicity. The reality is COVID-19 does not discriminate based on ethnicity, gender, religion, or any other social classification. It is a global pandemic and use of discriminatory language distracts from the problem and only perpetuates unfounded misinformation. We all can, and must, do better.

During this difficult time, we, as Americans and global citizens, must unite in trying to “flatten the curve” to keep COVID-19 from spreading. To that end, APABA calls on the President and all leaders to lead by example and stop using language with divisive and xenophobic undertones, to denounce racism and discrimination against the Asian American community, and to work harder on uniting the nation as we combat the COVID-19 pandemic *together*.

APABA is, proudly, a nonpartisan organization. This statement is not about politics, political parties or division, but rather, aims to encourage more informed public discourse from our elected leaders who must all focus on overcoming the COVID-19 pandemic and protecting the public health of all Americans. Advancing stereotypes and generalizations against Asian Americans does nothing to advance these efforts. As with all challenges we face as Americans, we are stronger when we stand together.