



Roundtable Convenes Open Forum, and AAPI Community Reflects on Increased Hate Crimes and History of Racism

By Katelyn Hamilton, Vice President, MA Business Roundtable

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“We [the AAPI community] are an afterthought at best and excluded at worst.”

–Sam Hyun, Chair of the Massachusetts Asian American Commission

As part of the Roundtable’s bi-weekly Open Forum series for member companies, the Roundtable convened a session dedicated to understanding the pervasive and deep-rooted discrimination the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community has faced for centuries.

Following an emotional presentation by **Dr. Paul Watanabe**, Professor of Political Science and Director of the Institute for Asian America Studies at UMass Boston, featured panelists shared their reflections as well as action steps members and the Roundtable can take to be allies in the workplace and stand up against racism and discrimination in our communities. Moderated by **Karan Dyson**, Chair of the Roundtable’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Task Force, the panel included:

- **Representative Tackey Chan:** Chair of the Asian American Caucus in the Massachusetts House of Representatives
- **Sam Hyun:** Chair of the Massachusetts Asian American Commission
- **Grace Lee:** Roundtable Member, and Senior Vice President and Director of Government Banking at People’s United Bank

In Dr. Paul Watanabe’s historical framing, he provided numerous examples of how history has ignored and excluded the AAPI community, thus contributing to the sentiment of the “invisible minority.” He pointed out that, although the AAPI community is the fastest growing racial group within Boston, often less is known about them than other minority groups and they are often ignored, especially when it comes to issues around systemic racism. Dr. Watanabe also reminded the audience that while the AAPI community is often described as a singular community, it is not a monolith. The AAPI designation comprises numerous distinct sub-ethnic groups that each bring their own valuable views and experiences.

With 35% of discrimination against the AAPI community occurring in the workplace, the responding panel suggested three ways the business community can work to address this form of racism within their workplace:

- 1) **Allyship:** Identify yourself and your company as an ally for the AAPI community.
- 2) **Zero-Tolerance:** Condemn all acts of hate including those against the AAPI community.
- 3) **Policy:** Reaffirm your company’s anti-discrimination policies explicitly include the AAPI community.

In addition to these action steps within the workplace, legislation pending in the Massachusetts Legislature was discussed and will continue to be monitored by the Roundtable, including:

- 1) **Hate Crimes Bill:** Updates state laws to better define hate crimes and restructure penalties.
- 2) **Parity on Public Boards:** Requires gender parity and racial and ethnic diversity on public boards and commissions.
- 3) **Data Disaggregation:** Calls for breakdown in demographic data to include sub-ethnic groups of races, therefore, helping to better understand and serve the varying needs of individual ethnic groups.

This Open Forum marked the first of many discussions the Roundtable hopes to have to further understand, learn, and stand up as Anti-Racist allies within the AAPI community as well as against racism and discrimination in all its forms. We look forward to continuing efforts to build more inclusive workplaces and communities and hope the Open Forum model continues to provide a safe space for members to share and learn from each other.