



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### ASIAN AMERICAN & PACIFIC ISLANDER SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS MEET WITH GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS IN CHICAGO TO DISCUSS THE STATE AND FUTURE OF AAPI BUSINESSES

**[October 20, Chicago, Illinois]** – The [National Asian/Pacific Islander American Chamber of Commerce and Entrepreneurship](#) (National ACE), alongside affiliate partners, the [Chinese Mutual Aid Association](#) and the [Asian American Coalition of Chicago](#), hosted an AAPISTRONG Small Business Roundtable for Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) small business owners to discuss the current state of business in Chicago.

The AAPISTRONG Small Business Roundtable is an open forum for Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander business owners in the United States to connect with policymakers, corporate partners, and community members to find solutions for the barriers facing minority-owned small businesses today. The Chicago event was the 21st roundtable this year and hosted over 50 small business owners and community leaders.

Joining AAPI entrepreneurs at the event were Alderperson Nicole Lee and State Representative Theresa Mah. Alderperson Lee is the first Asian American woman to serve on Chicago City Council and the first woman to represent Chicago's Ward 11, which is set to be the first Asian-majority ward in Chicago's history. Rep. Mah is the first Asian American to ever serve in the Illinois General Assembly and comes from a small business family herself. Small business owners and officials discussed policy interests, including discrimination, technical assistance, fairness in federal contracting, the Inflation Reduction Act, mental health, health care, and prompt payment from the state for government contractors.

Jennifer Chan, Founder and CEO of Banato, a Chicago-based, all-natural sorbet company, shared her struggles during the pandemic, including having to pivot her business to online pickup, encountering anti-Asian sentiment, and seeking government contracts. Melissa Garcia Villanueva, Founder and CEO of Brewpoint Coffee, a women and minority-owned, mission-driven, and specialty coffee company, also sought resources to provide sufficient mental health and health care services for her staff, most of whom continued working at Brewpoint throughout the pandemic.

Participants also discussed the importance of having AAPIs in positions of influence in government and corporate spaces. In government, having proper representation is important for determining budgets, state programs, and resource allocation. AAPI representatives have a better understanding of AAPI needs, and increasing AAPI representation in state legislatures will help AAPI concerns be addressed



more effectively. Similarly, attendees emphasized the importance of having AAPIs on corporate and nonprofit boards.

“Our business community continues to face many challenges. Asian American and Pacific Islander small business owners have battled both COVID-19 and a sharp spike in discrimination and violence. Our policymakers play a significant role in protecting our community, allowing our small businesses to operate safely, and creating prosperity,” said National ACE President and CEO, Chiling Tong. “This conversation will help policymakers understand the unmet needs of our community so we can find solutions. National ACE looks forward to working with our partners in Chicago to advance solutions that will help our economy move forward.”

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**About National ACE:**

National ACE’s mission is to serve as a strong advocate of AAPI business interests and positive change on all issues that enhance and advance the goals and aspirations of AAPI business owners, entrepreneurs, and corporate leaders. National ACE strives to do this through supporting and promoting issues that impact the AAPI business community, improving the economic development and economic impact of the AAPI community, advancing coalitions and enhancing community building, and fostering the next generation of AAPI entrepreneurs and executives. National ACE provides a unified voice for the business interests of AAPIs nationally. Learn more at [www.nationalace.org](http://www.nationalace.org) or [www.aapistrong.com](http://www.aapistrong.com).

**About Chinese Mutual Aid Association:**

Proudly founded by ethnic Chinese refugees in 1981, Chinese Mutual Aid Association (CMAA) is led by many prominent individuals from the Asian American community. Our purpose is to serve the needs, promote the interests, and enhance the well-being of low-income, diverse immigrant and refugee communities across metropolitan Chicago through social services, advocacy, educational programming and assistance for youth, adults, the elderly and small businesses.

[Home | CMAA \(chinesemutualaid.org\)](http://www.chinesemutualaid.org)

**About Asian American Coalition of Chicago:**

The mission of the Asian American Coalition of Chicago (AACCC) is to unite all Asian Americans into a significant force for strengthening the Asian American Community in the United States; enriching Asian cultural values, and recognizing the importance of Asian American contributions to the American democracy and economy.

[Asian American Coalition of Chicago \(aacchicago.org\)](http://www.aacchicago.org)