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UNPRECEDENTED GATHERING OF OHIO'S ASIAN AMERICANS SHOWS THEIR CLOUT

COLUMBUS – Nearly 400 Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) from across Ohio came together in historic fashion to learn about each other's communities and the importance of political engagement from local and national leaders at the first-ever AAPI Legislative Day on June 8.

For a great number of people this was their first time at the State House and meeting with state officials, said Hewen Slak, of the Chinese Association of Greater Toledo. "Hopefully today will plant the seed for lifelong community involvement."

The event, held in the Main Atrium of the Ohio Statehouse, connected old and emerging immigrant communities, some of whom have never been outside their ethnic enclaves, to elected officials in order to highlight the major issues that affect these groups: civil rights, health, economic development and cultural arts and education.

"This day is another important turning point for us," said Dr. Yung-Chen Lu, Chair for the AAPI Legislative Day. "We must learn and dialogue with each other and take that back to our regions and begin identifying our issues and organize around them."

Keynote Speaker Kiran Ahuja, the executive director of the White House's AAPI Initiative, told the audience how to act like you own the place. "Act like you own the place," she said. "You're supposed to be here. So go in with that confidence."

Ohio Senator Ray Miller (D-15), Senate Minority Whip and Founder and Chairman of the Ohio Commission on Minority Health, also spoke. A post-lunch legislative panel that included State Representative Jay Goyal (D-73), the only Asian American in the Ohio legislature, allowed attendees to meet politicians and ask them questions.

"Our populations are growing in Ohio and so we need to let our state policymakers know how they must respond to what our communities are saying" said Michael Byun, the Executive Director of Asian Services in Action, Inc., in Cleveland.

AAPIs at the event included Korean, Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, Laotian, Vietnamese, Japanese, Taiwanese, Thai, Hmong and Bhutanese. The Legislative Day was organized by the Ohio Asian American Coalition and brought together groups from Columbus, Cleveland, Dayton, Akron, Toledo and Cincinnati.

AAPIs make up nearly 2 percent of Ohio's population, according to the U.S. Census, and close to 5 percent of the nation. [Please click here for more information and photos and video from the event.](#)

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The Ohio Asian American Coalition formed in 2000 around health issues. Coalition founding members include Asian-American Community Service Council (Columbus), Asian American Community Services (Columbus), Asian American Council of Dayton, Asian Community Alliance (Cincinnati), Asian Festival Corporation (Columbus), Asian Services In Action (Akron/Cleveland) and Chinese Association of Greater Toledo.