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NFALA THANKS AND SUPPORTS OUR FILIPINO FRONTLINERS

LOS ANGELES — The National Filipino Lawyers Association (NFALA) marks this year's International Nurses Day in recognition of the incredible contributions of Filipino nurses and health workers across the country. NFALA stands with them amidst the great challenges they face at work during the COVID-19 pandemic and against the disturbing rise of racism that they face outside of work.

The Philippines is a top exporter of front-line health care workers to the United States and other western countries. The reasons for this are rooted in the colonial and immigration history of the United States in the Philippines and are detailed in the book *Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History* by Catherine Ceniza Choy, a professor of ethnic studies at the University of California Berkeley.

Filipino nurses helped ease the acute nursing shortages experienced by the U.S. after World War II. Often, they did the jobs that no one else wanted, serving in inner-city and rural hospitals and working the least desirable jobs and shifts. As a result, throughout their history, Filipino nurses frequently have been in the front lines of emergencies in the U.S., such as the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s and 1990s.

This intricate history has resulted in astonishing numbers of Filipinos in the U.S. health care industry today. One of four adult Filipinos in the New York, New Jersey area are in the health care industry. Filipinos are four times as likely to be nurses as compare with any other immigrants. In states like California and New York, the numbers are particularly breathtaking—Filipinos make up about 20 percent of the nursing workforce in these states.

Now, in the face of the COVID-19 crisis, Filipino nurses and health care workers bear a substantial burden. While there is no official count of the number of Filipino nurses and health care workers who have gotten sick from the novel coronavirus, news reports, obituaries and social media make clear that the virus and the resulting strain on the health care industry have exacted a heavy toll.

For example, Celia Marcos, a 61-year-old nurse at Hollywood Presbyterian Medical Center, died two days after she was diagnosed with COVID-19. Her co-workers have claimed that she was not given adequate protective equipment by their employer. Deaths have also included Susan Sisgundo and Ernesto "Audie" DeLeon, who worked as nurses at Bellevue Hospital in New York City; Marlino Cagas, who spent 40 years as a pharmacy tech at Harlem Hospital before embarking on a nursing career at the age of 60; Jessie Ariel Ferreras, a family practitioner in Bergen County.

Even among survivors, the toll is great. Marcial Reyes, a charge nurse in the emergency department of the Kaiser Permanente medical center in Fontana, California, had to be put into a medically-induced coma and intubated for 10 days as a result of COVID-19. He would later find out that his wife, also a nurse, and his 5-year old son also had contracted the virus.

Unfortunately, these stories are not isolated incidences. According to ProPublica, there have been at least 30 deaths of Filipino health care workers in the New York-New Jersey region alone since the end of March and many more deaths in those peoples' extended families. Further, the Filipino American National

Historical Society (FAHNS) has posted on its Facebook page many more names of Filipino health care workers in the U.S. who have been impacted by the virus.

Nonetheless, despite the great personal risk to themselves, Filipinos continue to answer the call to service during the present crisis. They have embraced the fight against an invisible enemy. The least we can do in the face of such patriotism and courage is say thank you. Yet, instead, our society does a great disservice to them by failing to do what we can to protect them.

Health care workers continue to report a shocking lack of adequate protective equipment. Further, hate crimes and incidents against Asian Americans, including health care workers, are on the rise. For example, according to a PBS report, a doctor was told to “go back to f--- China” while on his way to work. An Asian nurse delivering medicine to a sick patient was spat on.

Such conduct towards Asian Americans and our health care workers is shocking and cannot be accepted. During this International Nurses Day, we must come together as a society and do more to ensure that the very people who are fighting for our welfare feel safe at work and at home. NFALA applauds and stands with our Filipino and Asian American nurses and health workers and reiterates its position (1) opposing hate- and bias-motivated acts, (2) condemning and rejecting white nationalism and white supremacy, and (3) urging political and civic leaders to speak out against racism, white supremacy and xenophobia.

NFALA is the national voice for the Filipino American legal profession. It advocates for justice, civil rights, and equal opportunity for the Filipino American community. It cultivates high standards of integrity and professionalism among its members and strives for the advancement and success of Filipino Americans within the profession. NFALA is a family, comprised of members throughout the United States, with the shared goal of increasing its national growth, impact, and visibility while also celebrating its members' cultural heritage.

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