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### Filipino-Americans Encouraged to Engage with Wider Community at Philadelphia Townhall



L-R AARP's Grace Rusia, Dep Director Randy Duque, Consul General Theresa Dizon-De Vega, Ms. Tiffany Chang Lawson, Councilor David Oh, Sr. Deputy Attorney General Pearl Kim (photo by NYPCG)

9 October 2017, New York – The buzzwords were engagement and involvement at a Townhall for the Filipino-American Community in Pennsylvania on 08 October 2017 at the St. Augustine Church Parish Hall in downtown Philadelphia. The activity coincided with the commemoration of Filipino-American History Month throughout the US.

Organized by the Pennsylvania Governor's Advisory Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs and supported by the Philippine Consulate General in New York, Filipino Executive Council of Greater Philadelphia, National Federation of Filipino-American Associations-PA Chapter (NaFFAA-Pennsylvania), and the Philippine American Chamber of Commerce of Pennsylvania and Southern New Jersey, the event attended by over 50 Community leaders tackled the need for greater involvement of Asian-Americans and Filipino-Americans in policy-influencing platforms.

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Facilitated by Commissioner Brad Baldia and Executive Director Tiffany Chang Lawson, the Townhall featured a panel discussion with Consul General Theresa Dizon De Vega, Philadelphia City Councilor David Oh, Senior Deputy Attorney General Pearl Kim, Deputy Director Randy Duque of the Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations, and AARP Associate State Director Grace Rustia. The panel discussion was followed by Breakout Discussion Groups with the Filipino-American Community participants.

The panel discussants emphasized the need for more Filipino-Americans to be aware of services and platforms available to them in Pennsylvania. Consul General De Vega issued a call for greater involvement with other Asian-American and Pacific Islander Communities on common issues such as healthcare, education, immigration, and economics. She also shared some of the key findings of the National Asian American Survey (NAAS) for 2017 which provides some interesting insights on the level of political engagement of Filipino-Americans as well as the issues which matter to them most.

Councilor Oh encouraged more Filipinos to speak out in public fora and use other platforms to reach legislators and officials while Mr. Duque and Ms. Rustia echoed calls for Filipino-Americans to share any of their experiences with discrimination, micro-aggression and similar concerns.

Senior Deputy Attorney General Kim noted that among the cases they have observed which affect Filipinos more than other Asian ethnicities is vulnerability of middle-aged Filipinas to labor trafficking.

Dr. Aida Rivera, Head of NaFFAA Region , said that the activity, the first of its kind for Fil-Ams and the most well-attended for the Asian-American Community according to the Pennsylvania Governor's Office, is an eye opener for many community leaders. "It really provided an opportunity to talk about sensitive issues faced by Fil-Ams", she added.

The Townhall is among the avenues being pursued to encourage more synergy and engagement in sociocivic and political issues among Filipino-Americans. Aside from the Townhall discussions, participants were also encouraged to register as voters for both US and Philippine elections. END



Commissioner Brad Baldia (center) facilitates a breakout group session



Open Forum at the Townhall Event

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