Honoring Asian American and Pacific Island Heritage Month

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This Asian Pacific American Heritage Month, we recognize civil rights activist Amanda Nguyen. A horrible incident as a young woman inspired her to found Rise, a nonprofit seeking to advocate for others similarly affected, and she also helped ignite the Stop Asian Hate movement. Nguyen's story follows.

While a student at Harvard University in 2013, she was sexually assaulted and encountered significant hurdles in navigating the legal system. In particular, she did not feel she had the resources and time necessary to pursue charges at that time, and learned that she needed to submit an extension to maintain her rape kit *every six months* to ensure that the police would not destroy it.

Because of this experience, Nguyen founded Rise in 2014 to bring equality to sexual assault survivors across the United States and drafted the Sexual Assault Survivors' Bill of Rights, a list of basic civil rights for sexual assault survivors that has served as the basis for federal and state legislation. Nguyen was integral in passing the federal Survivors' Bill of Rights Act of 2016, which provides a number of rights including: (1) the right to receive a forensic medical examination at no cost; (2) preservation of the rape kit for either 20 years or the maximum applicable statute of limitations, whichever is shorter; (3) written notice of the destruction or disposal of a rape kit; and (4) the right to be informed of their rights and policies. The bill was signed into law by President Barack Obama in 2016.

Since then, Nguyen has advocated for the passing of similar bills in all 50 states. Through her incubator program Rise Justice Labs, she is also working to help others write and pass bills to address social justice issues by offering funds, training, and access to professional services. Nguyen was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2019 and was named one of the 2022 TIME Women of the Year. She's even taken her work international. In 2022, Nguyen and Rise were instrumental in advocating for the United Nations General Assembly to pass a resolution urging its Member States to provide access to the mechanisms of justice for survivors of sexual assault.

More recently, she has been a voice speaking out against violence and racism against Asians exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. During the wave of anti-Asian violence in 2021, she called for more media attention and public action.

Nguyen has inspired us all by dedicating her life to protecting the rights of sexual assault survivors and continuing to advocate for the AAPI community. We celebrate Amanda Nguyen as a tireless advocate to effect social change.