

**Statement from Chair Brenda Howerton on behalf of the Durham County Commissioners
condemning Tuesday's deadly mass shootings at Atlanta Georgia area businesses**

March 22, 2021

Like many others, I watched in horror as news reports of multiple deaths resulting from three separate shooting incidents in and near Atlanta Georgia emerged Tuesday evening. I was especially heartbroken to learn that a gunman had viciously murdered eight people, the majority of whom were Asian women. Indeed, our hearts and prayers go out to the families of the victims whose lives have been forever altered by the loss of their loved ones. We also pray for the recovery of the surviving victim and his family.

Tragically, the first incident took place in Cherokee County, Georgia where five people were shot by the suspect and only one victim survived. About an hour later, the suspect traveled to Atlanta and again fired shots at victims in two other businesses located in the same proximity. Three women were shot to death inside the first business, and a fourth woman was found dead in the other business across the street.

If not for a positive ID of the gunman shared by family members as a result of cameras located at the businesses, and coordination of law enforcement officials in the two jurisdictions, the suspect most likely would have extended his killing spree to other locations, leaving more victims in his wake.

While an official motive is not yet confirmed and the investigation continues, the fact is that 8 innocent people are dead, and most of them were Asian. Over the past year, we've seen a marked increase in various crimes against members of the Asian community in our major urban centers and in smaller towns. We are mindful of the current anti-Asian sentiments that continue to escalate, and we simply cannot thrive as a nation if we continue to perpetuate a spirit of hatred against any minority groups.

Tragic, heartbreaking killings such as these continue to amplify the need for our communities to come together and show a spirit of unity. We must begin to have conversations that lead to a greater understanding of our differences, and earnestly work to develop respect for our worth, dignity and values in order to thrive as a more perfect union.

Together, we must do the work if we want to see change.

Brenda Howerton
Chair
Durham Board of County Commissioners