

## **After January 6<sup>th</sup>: Messaging Memo for Child Advocates**

Updated January 14, 2021

On January 6<sup>th</sup>, the President of the United States incited a violent mob of white supremacists to attack the US Capitol, as our duly-elected representatives in Congress were voting to certify the results of a free and fair democratic election. This act of terror took place against the backdrop of a global pandemic raging out of control, and the associated economic hardship, unprecedented in most of our lifetimes.

It's hard to know what to say, when we ourselves are struggling to process shocking events and our own emotions as they unfold. We're writing to share some resources from trusted sources to help you navigate this time, stay focused on your mission, and speak clearly about the situation.

The guidance and sample messages below are pulled directly from trusted sources including the Frameworks Institute, the Voting Rights Lab, the Center for Social Inclusion, and NC Child's own content. We urge you to explore the excellent resources available from these and other sources (see resource list at the end of this document).

### **Guidelines for Proactive Messaging**

#### **Acknowledge what happened**

Turn off your scheduled emails and social media posts – or at least rethink them. The larger context of political upheaval, racial violence, and pandemic are our reality right now. Keep that in mind whenever you are speaking to your community and your clients. Every message doesn't need to be an "official statement" from your agency on the events of the day. However, this is not the time to proceed as if we are in business as usual. Acknowledge the chaos in our families' lives right now, emphasizing that your mission-driven work continues – projecting stability in the face of massive social instability.

We are deeply troubled by yesterday's events at the United States Capitol. We affirm our commitment to nonviolent, democratic approaches to advancing social justice, and condemn any attempts to overturn or delegitimize the results of a free and fair election.

The attack on the Capitol is an extension of events and trends that have been unfolding for years, but the severity of the moment calls for all of us to speak up. What we say now and how we say it can shape what happens next. People who participated in yesterday's violence put resentment, entitlement, and

intimidation on display. In response, we need to communicate and demonstrate our highest values. ([Frameworks](#))

We are living through historic and dangerous times. But we can't back away. This is a crucial time for us as child advocates to come together and use our power peacefully to defend democracy. (NC Child)

### **Lead with values**

“No matter the specific situation, we must lead with our values. We have the moral high ground and we must approach messaging from this perch. By doing so, we disrupt cynicism, break through the partisan noise, and remind people not merely what's at stake but how it can serve to impact their lives. In leading with our values, we should say what we are for – not what we are against.” ([Voting Rights Lab](#))

A strong democracy is essential to Community Catalyst's mission of fighting for a country where all people and communities have power over the decisions that affect our health, including and especially decisions made by policymakers. In order for the people to exercise our will, all elected officials must fulfill their duty to uphold and protect our constitution. When they undermine that duty, we must hold them accountable in order to protect our ability to fight for a country where all people can be healthy and free. (Community Catalyst)

### **Make this a moment about mission**

“What are the implications of these events for the causes you champion? Why does a peaceful transition of power matter for children and youth, for families, for climate action, for immigration, for racial justice and equity, for justice reform? How does political violence and extremist rhetoric undermine our shared progress as a society? Focus on aspects of the events that connect to your issue and make the connections clear and apparent.” ([Frameworks](#))

Our children's future depends on a rigorous, peaceful defense of democracy in accordance with the rule of law. (NC Child)

**As citizens of our democratic nation, we have a responsibility to use our power as advocates to create a better future for children and families in NC.** Join us for our weekly legislative updates so we can encourage each other and learn from each other as we step into that power together. (NC Child)

### **Get explicit about race**

There is no doubt that the aim of the rioters on Wednesday was to intimidate and disenfranchise people of color.

“Show that we're all in this together so that it is harder for the opposition to divide us by race. Say we're all affected, across race. Explain how each racial group is affected (recognize the unique pain of each group)... Raise racial disparities.” ([Center for Social Inclusion](#))

We are deeply concerned about the safety and well-being of everyone in the US Capitol. The white supremacy that has led to stark health inequities among BIPOC is the same white supremacy that has emboldened violent protestors to storm our Capitol in an attempt to thwart a fair and free election. We hope for a peaceful and swift resolution, and we remain confident that democracy will prevail. ([Community Catalyst](#))

Yesterday's domestic terrorism exposes the painful truth that our democracy was founded on centuries of white supremacy. We see the reverberating damage not only in this insurrection, but also in the rise of fascism, ongoing police violence, COVID's outsized harms to communities of color, voter suppression, wealth inequality, disparate health outcomes, education funding and more.

While the coup ultimately did not succeed, the brazen breach of the Capitol for the first time in more than 200 years broadcasts the urgent need for racial equity and pro-democracy, transformational work happening across the South to create truly representative government. Our partners are undaunted, and so are we. As Georgia shows, with sustained investment in communities, diligence, trust and love, we can begin to envision a stronger, more inclusive democracy that works for everyone. (Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation)

### **Do not repeat the opposition's language**

Repeating the opposition's language only makes it stronger – even if you are trying to rebut it. Retweeting or restating harmful language gives it more power. Instead of a rebuttal, put forward a positive vision of your values and your mission.

The path to unity flows through accountability. The path to healing begins with justice. #JusticeForUS (Voting Rights Lab)

### **Make all your words count**

“Choose terms with care—thinking through their meaning and the effects that they will have. ‘Protestors’ suggests action that is essential to the health of democracy. The breach of the Capitol was not protest; we should not refer to it as such. ‘Trump supporters’ includes too broad a group. Use terms that make it clear that these actions are well outside the boundaries of civic participation: talk about riots, mob violence, extremists, white nationalists.” ([Frameworks](#))

### **Make this a moment in a movement**

“What are your immediate objectives and your long-term goals? Will the language you use now serve only in the short term, or can it advance the narratives and ideas your work needs in the long term? A dramatic recounting of the events, for instance, could evoke emotional responses in the short term, but will age quickly. Thoughtful observations about the meaning of the day—such as the causes and consequences of political extremism, or the connections between racism and mob violence in America—advance ideas that always need to be in the public discourse.” ([Frameworks](#))

Our nation faces grave challenges, including a still severe health and economic crisis; gaping inequities across lines of race, ethnicity, and immigration status; and severely stressed democratic institutions, processes, and norms. As an organization we stand ready to work in the coming year with the Biden-Harris Administration and all members of the 117th Congress to advance equity and social justice using our democracy’s peaceful levers for change. ([CBPP](#))

### **Center the voters, not the politicians**

“People are tired of partisan fights and crave unity. We must discuss this election in terms of the will of the people, not the clash of two politicians. It’s not about Biden or Trump, but about swearing in a government of, by, and for us. ...Statements like “we won, get over it” and the like do not aid our cause.

“In refuting Trump’s lies, research suggests it’s helpful to zoom out beyond Trump as our named antagonist. Because he is such a consuming and polarizing figure, not name-checking him is one way to lend greater focus to the actions of the voters.” ([Voting Rights Lab](#))

### **Speak directly to children**

Children of all ages are highly perceptive. Even if they’re not old enough to read the news themselves, they are listening to adult conversations and taking emotional cues from our reactions. Don’t leave them out of the discussion – they need reassurance from the trusted adults in their lives.

Child development experts have provided a wealth of resources for talking to children about violence, racism, political and social upheaval. This [article and resource list](#) from the Child Mind Institute is a great starting point.

### **Always end with a solution**

“Always suggest a solution to the problem with which you started the message. And make it a solution that is connected to the values you are tapping – opportunity, fairness and equality. The solution doesn’t always have to be of narrow personal benefit. The solution might benefit the nation, not just individuals.” ([Center for Social Inclusion](#))

Democracy is all of us acting together for the common good. As child advocates and agents of social change, we all have a critical role to play in building a public narrative that uplifts and advances the common good on behalf of our children and families – especially in times of crisis. Please reach out and let us know how we can support you.

**Contact:** Fawn Pattison, NC Child Campaigns Director  
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### **Sources**

- FrameWorks Institute: [“Speaking out about January 6<sup>th</sup>”](#) email newsletter
- Voting Rights Lab: [How We Message November 3<sup>rd</sup> and Beyond](#)
- Center for Social Inclusion: [Talking About Race with New Audiences While Building Support Among Voters of Color](#)
- Center for Budget & Policy Priorities: [Our Democracy’s Peaceful Levers of Change, Not Lies and Violence, Should Be Celebrated and Strengthened](#)
- ChildMind Institute: [Racism and Violence: How to Help Kids Handle the News](#)
- Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation: [Towards a New Democracy](#)