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January 13, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Speaker
United States House of Representatives
1236 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell, Leader
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy, Leader
United States House of Representatives
2468 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer, Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Leaders McConnell, McCarthy, and Schumer:

We write on behalf of the Board of Directors of the Society for the Study of Social Problems (one of the oldest and most respected social science organizations in the United States) to express our outrage over recent events in the Capitol and at the White House. On January 6th, thousands of domestic terrorists stormed and vandalized our two houses of congress in an effort to stop the constitutional process of confirming the democratic election of a new President. This attempted insurrection was incited by an unprecedented and vile assault on truth and facts. And the centrality of white nationalism and racism characterized not only the mob's core message, but the differential treatment they received from police and security officials who, only months earlier, attacked peaceful Black Lives Matter protestors with chemical gas, rubber bullets and batons. Before elaborating, however, we wish to express our condolences to the families and other loved ones of the individuals who lost their lives; including a police officer, Brian D. Sicknick, who had also served in the military prior to joining the Capitol Police.

As social scientists, we place a high premium on the scientific method, qualitative and quantitative research, evidence-based claims, data and facts. The assault on the Capitol, however, was fueled by a steady diet of conspiracy theories and lies, designed to undermine and delegitimize the results of a democratic election described by experts and federal watchdogs as the most secure in the history of the United States (JOINT STATEMENT FROM ELECTIONS INFRASTRUCTURE GOVERNMENT COORDINATING COUNCIL & THE ELECTION INFRASTRUCTURE SECTOR COORDINATING EXECUTIVE COMMITTEES 11/12/20) Yet, for over 6 weeks, the President, his supporters, and over 100 members of Congress challenged election results as fraudulent despite over 60 court decisions finding no evidence of widespread fraud. We implore you to join us in asserting the importance of truth and facts in our civil lives.

All healthy societies have parties with different perspectives, policy initiatives, and analyses of social data and facts. But government leaders and democratic representatives, as well as social scientists, must hold ourselves to a higher standard of proof for claims, and to quickly and unequivocally reject and condemn any and all willful attempts to undermine the truth. We are not naïve. We know the role that misleading statements play and have always played in politics. But what we are observing today, and for the past 4-5 years especially, has taken this practice to a new low and is far beyond the pale of what is and should be acceptable. Unfortunately, with the ability of individuals to spread lies far and wide on social media, the threat to

the truth and facts has never been greater. We urge you, at minimum, not to aid and abet it. We do ourselves a great service by remembering this astute observation by Voltaire over two centuries ago: “Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities.” The events of January 6, 2021 are a testament to the profundity of this observation.

Politicians and elected officials who have contributed to this assault on our democracy must be held accountable, if for no other reason than to ensure that everyone is equal under the law. In fact, elected representatives who have sworn an oath to the Constitution ought to be held to an even higher standard and we urge you to ensure that legislators honor their oath. Indeed, we believe it is your job to do so. In the same vein, those who stormed the Capitol, attacked Capitol Police, broke into and vandalized offices must be held accountable for their actions.

In closing, we wish to focus your attention on yet another event where police and security agencies demonstrated differential procedures and treatment for white citizens as opposed to non-white and anti-racist protestors. White nationalist and allied organizations had planned the event for weeks with even the President suggesting the gathering would be “wild.” Government agencies had previously identified such “home-grown” militia groups as the greatest terrorist threats to the nation. Yet these armed insurrectionists were able to overrun barriers, break into the Capitol Building, ransack congressional offices, and walk unrestricted throughout the Senate chambers taking selfies and issuing threats of death to the Vice President and the Speaker of the House. This official response from law enforcement begs comparison with the brutal treatment of Black Lives Matter protestors (largely African American) who protested peacefully in the streets of D.C. The image of national guardsmen lining the steps of the Lincoln Memorial during BLM protests stands in stark contrast to the meager resistance offered to stop last week’s lynch mob. While racial hatred lay at the heart of those waving confederate flags amidst the rubble of the Capitol, the historical and institutional racism of American policing also presented itself front and center. Social scientists have for decades provided research to demonstrate racial bias—from profiling and stop and frisk to mass incarceration and the disproportionate numbers of unarmed black people compared to unarmed white people who are shot by police. But if anyone needed more proof, we saw it in plain view on January 6th at the Capitol. To be clear, we are not demanding that police shoot or brutalize white “protesters” the way they too often do people of color. Rather, we expect that police will treat all people with measured responses that respect the right to protest but do not aid and abet anti-democratic insurrection. The last thing we want is a police state or the militarization of the police. We do want everyone, regardless of race and ethnicity, to be treated fairly – and equally.

If you wish to discuss any of our concerns in more detail, please do not hesitate to contact us. In closing, however, we wish to applaud political leaders who have decried white supremacy, these shameless assaults on democratic processes and principles, and the role of too many of their colleagues in encouraging them.

Sincerely,



Héctor L. Delgado, Ph.D.
Executive Officer, SSSP
Professor Emeritus, University of La Verne



Corey Dolgon, Ph.D.
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Professor of Sociology, Faculty Director Downtown
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Cc: Vice President Michael R. Pence
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