

DRAFT:

Buffalo Civic and Religious Leaders Speak Out Against Political Violence

We, the leaders of a broad range of communities in Western New York, have grown increasingly concerned about heightened partisan tension and threats of political violence in our community and country. Like so many, we have seen escalating political tension in our civic gatherings, religious services, and daily life. This tension threatens to divide and turn us against one another. But we believe another way is possible. We invite you to join us as Courageous Neighbors to forge a new path forward.

Over the past year, through the support and partnership of national bridge-building organization Resetting the Table, each of us has committed ourselves not only to crossing divides and holding brave conversations, but also to spreading the will and skill to do so in our broader community.

We've learned that this work involves seeking out unlikely partners and listening to one another with the intent to understand one another's convictions. To be clear, this does not mean abandoning our convictions and principles. In fact, we do not agree on many things. However, we are united in our commitment to build a safe and flourishing community for all of us.

A year ago, many of us would not have sat around a shared table. Since then, we have had many difficult and critical conversations, never shying away from our differences. Rather, it was by addressing our differences head on, with honesty, vulnerability, and courage that we were able to come to see not only our differences but also one another with greater clarity, accuracy, and humanity. We may not always see eye to eye, but we've crossed chasms of difference of background and perspective to make this shared call to our broader Buffalo community. We have learned that re-stitching our societal fabric and ensuring safety in this election cycle, and beyond, will require all of us to take collective action without relinquishing our deeply held beliefs.

Our Commitment

We know that our communities are fraught with tension and distrust regarding the electoral process. We must not let these divisions lead us to violence or chaos. Instead, we collectively affirm our commitment to a safe, violence-free election cycle. We are committed to building a better future and community for all of us.

What We Hope For

Join us, to build a community where:

1. **Political Violence Is Denounced:** We reject intimidation, dehumanization, and political violence, recognizing it as a threat to our democracy and society.

2. **Community Stewardship Belongs to All of Us:** We call on every neighbor and every leader to embody the ideals of good citizenship, including participation in the democratic process and care for neighbors in and beyond our own backyards.
3. **Brave Spaces Are Created:** We invite our communities to engage in courageous conversations that allow for understanding without the expectation of agreement. Productive disagreement is a necessary ingredient of a healthy democracy. We have learned that we are stronger as a community when we build genuine relationships not in spite of our differences but precisely by having gone through them.

Call to Action

In anticipation of the upcoming elections, we call upon every person in our community to take three immediate, concrete steps.

1. **Stop and Listen.** Challenge yourself to really hear the concerns and commitments of your neighbors. Invite a conversation with someone with whom you know you have differences of opinion. Listen to understand them. Speak to help them understand you. Doing so does not necessitate agreement.
2. **Pause Before Acting.** Resist the urge to act on impulse. Creating change requires intention and consideration.
3. **Spread the Message.** Utilize your platforms to amplify this commitment, reaching as many individuals and communities as possible in the spirit of collective care and collaboration.

Continued Effort

Ongoing work must be done to ensure the restitching of our societal fabric. All of us has the opportunity to:

- **Promote Courageous Discourse:** Disagreements can be opportunities for dialogue that leads to stronger relationships, insight, and capacity to solve our most important problems.
- **Reject Violence of All Kinds:** Whether political or otherwise, at any time and at any place.
- **Create a Culture of Concern for Others:** We are all leaders. Someone listens when you speak. Call on those in your communities and around your tables to reject violence and build a thriving community for all of us.
- **Build the Skills, Take Advantage of Our Trainings:** We invite you to develop the skills that will help realize this vision. Over twenty of us have been trained by Resetting the Table to lead workshops and teach skills to support this kind of courageous communication. Several hundred Buffalo residents of a variety of backgrounds and perspectives have already participated. Whether you wish to engage within your institutions, congregations, workplaces, schools, or with those you hold dear, we are here to support you.

Conclusion

We stand here, the day before a national election that has been rife with divisive and escalatory rhetoric, calling on *all* of us to rise against forces that would tear us apart and to affirm a new commitment to building a safe and thriving community for all of us.

As diverse leaders in our community, we recognize that our different political views can serve as a source of strength. When we take all of our concerns, our fears, and our aspirations seriously, we are often able to find unexpected solutions that we may have not previously imagined possible. Political violence is not the answer. We stand together as proof that our differences need not tear us apart, but rather by fearlessly addressing and going through them, we can begin to restitch the fabric of a fraying society.

Let's build a Buffalo that can be a model of a healthy, vibrant, safe community – not despite but precisely because of our differences.

Buffalo can lead the way and be an example for our country. We believe that it can and must.

Signatories

Rabbi Alex Lazarus-Klein
Dr. Daniel Trippie
Elder Kelly Marie Wofford
Hon. Charley H. Fisher III
John Camardo
Charis Humphrey
Michael Ramos
Jaime Lynn Hodge
Dana Hensley
Adamaah Grayse
Rev. Dr. Jonathan D. Lawrence
Rev. Elizabeth Duffy
Fr. Arthur Ward
Hy Carrel
Jeremy M. Hazelton
Christopher Jhu
Marietta Bratton
Rev. Dr. M. Bruce McKay
Rev. Pierre Albrecht-Carrie
Nancy Pankow
Chaplain Elaine Utech
Howard Henry

Victoria Ross
Elaine Swaine
Janet Mazzaroppi
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Robin Raphael
Cyndi Perry
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