

February 5, 2021

Thank you for sharing your letter of concern about ASAE's Jan. 7 statement on the Jan. 6 assault on the U.S. Capitol building. The statement released by ASAE was carefully and thoughtfully constructed with approval from ASAE's staff and Board leadership to reflect our deep dismay and condemnation of the terrible attack that transpired at the Capitol. ASAE stands by the statement, though we fully acknowledge that some may feel the statement did not speak for them.

ASAE has a very large and diverse membership with political leanings across the spectrum, and it is clear from feedback we have received to date that many felt the statement was appropriate and met the moment, while others thought it went too far or not far enough. This is not surprising to us, as our nation is deeply polarized in this moment in our history. Regardless of personal politics, we are all affected by events such as last month's attack and have a wide range of opinions about what should be said in response.

Putting aside for a moment your opinion that ASAE's statement was "weak and equivocal," which we will have to respectfully disagree on, your letter and post on Collaborate and other channels seems to take issue with the timing of our statement, which was after some other organizations had issued something and before many others. To that, we can only say that the statement was issued in a timely manner after Congress was able to resume and conclude its Constitutionally mandated duties. Our goal with the statement was not to be first, it was to be representative of ASAE's reaction to what was a dangerous assault on our nation's democratic processes and a desecration of the U.S. Capitol building.

Apologies for the length of this letter, but we do want to respond substantively and with detail to your contention that "ASAE is not willing to publicly engage those difficult conversations and provide leadership by taking substantial and significant action to support racial justice," and your suggestion of a concrete action that ASAE could take regarding APAC and our future contribution strategy to members of Congress.

Because of ASAE's commitment to DEI, we felt it was important and necessary to point out the disparate treatment by law enforcement of those who engaged in the U.S. Capitol assault and those who protested racial injustice at mass demonstrations in cities across the U.S. over the summer. That point is made in ASAE's Jan. 7 statement here: *"It is also time to examine the stark contrast between the law enforcement response to these rioters intent on violence and the strong-arm tactics employed to quell protests for racial justice that took place last year in Washington and other parts of the country."*

ASAE embraces DEI as an association management discipline and is committed to creating space for difficult conversations, hearing the voices least heard and providing leadership where it is needed in association governance and operations. Last summer, after the tragic deaths of George Floyd and others, ASAE convened a forum for thousands of association leaders led by ASAE's diversity consultants at Ivy Consulting Group so that our community could have a discussion that thoughtfully and respectfully examines current events. From COVID-19 to the public deaths of black citizens, this session explored the impact of multiple pandemics, challenges to interacting with and serving each other across different viewpoints and approaches to effectively having these difficult conversations. We had the same session for our staff and it led to putting together a staff team internally to continue the conversation about what we can do to help each other feel understood and supported in our work, and how we can start to translate our commitment to each other into meaningful action.

Prior to these events, in 2018, ASAE proactively developed a D+I Strategic Plan, which was a collaborative effort between our stakeholders, including volunteer leaders, industry partners, consultants, DEI practitioners, CEOs and other influencers in the association community. The strategic plan builds on our past record and helps us anticipate opportunities and challenges regarding the future of our work over the next three years. Because our current plan expires at the end of FY21, ASAE's Diversity Committee is already working on the third iteration of this strategic plan and this will be reviewed by Ivy Consulting Group to ensure it's relevant given current events.

Diversity statements, guiding principles and organizational resources are helpful and necessary, but only part of the solution. We strongly believe that societal change requires engagement and sustained commitment from us all on every level, and we have a responsibility as association leaders to be facilitators for that necessary change. One of the ways ASAE has taken a more active role in DEI issues has been through our advocacy. We have taken a lead role in opposing discriminatory legislation at the state level, particularly on bills that would deny public accommodations to LGBTQ individuals or allow a business to deny service to someone based on a religious belief. Additionally, ASAE includes a clause in all hotel and destination contracts that makes clear that we will not hold meetings in locations with discriminatory laws on the books. Though we've encountered some resistance to this clause, ASAE has held firm that we will not threaten the success of a meeting or our attendees' rights by holding meetings in locations where ALL of our members might not feel welcome. We've shared this clause with ASAE members as a model that they can use in their own contract negotiations.

More recently, ASAE [strongly opposed](#) White House directives to federal agencies to end DEI training sessions for government workers and contractors. There were some people who disagreed with our opposition on that issue, but we felt strongly that we couldn't remain silent when the federal government is giving license to ignoring the very real barriers that millions of employees feel in their workplaces. ASAE also recently delivered a [letter](#) to President Biden urging the administration to engage the association community in policy discussions of critical importance to the nation. We are confident that associations will be tremendous resources for the federal government as it works to wrestle the pandemic under control, give families and businesses a bridge to economic stability and address the stark inequities in our economy that the pandemic has exposed.

While we believe ASAE's DEI efforts are robust, we are in no way asserting that our work in the DEI space is complete. There is still room and need for growth, and we are committed to our process and ingraining DEI considerations into everything we do organizationally.

Regarding APAC and its contribution strategy, out of the 147 Republican members of Congress who objected to the 2020 electoral college vote, only six were supported by APAC. The APAC committee met just recently to discuss the issue of future support to those six APAC-supported candidates. Following lengthy discussion and consideration, the committee voted to pause donations to those six for one year and revisit the decision again after reviewing contribution guidelines and reevaluating those members on a case-by-case basis. Rest assured that an elected official's voting record on issues of importance to associations is one factor weighed in determining support; their conduct as an elected member of the legislative body is another factor carefully considered by the committee.

ASAE will also continue to advocate for policies that support associations in their important missions and role in our society. This requires engaging in and promoting civil discourse and informing the legislative process that directly impacts our daily lives and the operational success of the organizations we lead and the industries and professions we represent.

Again, thank you for sharing your opinions about ASAE's statement and your recommendations for our future actions. I hope we have addressed your concerns. We share your anger and frustration with events like what

happened at the U.S. Capitol that only serve to draw our nation further apart. We are confident and committed to seeing ASAE and the association community serve as enablers of change for a better tomorrow.

Respectfully,



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President and CEO, Household & Commercial Products Association  
ASAE Board Chair



Susan Robertson, CAE  
President and CEO