

**January 15, 2021**

**ATTORNEY GENERAL RAOUL URGES FACEBOOK TO HALT WEAPON ACCESSORY ADVERTISEMENTS  
AMID HEIGHTENED THREATS AHEAD OF INAUGURATION**

***Raoul, 3 AGs Say Facebook Profits from Targeted Advertisements to Extremist-Prone Users***

**Chicago** — Attorney General Kwame Raoul, with three other attorneys general, today [issued a letter](#) urging Facebook, Inc. (Facebook), to halt the sale of military tactical gear and weapon accessories until after President-Elect Biden’s inauguration.

Following the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol, technology and social media companies made public statements saying that they would not tolerate their platform being used to incite violence. Meanwhile, Facebook continues to allow targeted advertisements selling military tactical gear and weapon accessories to Facebook users, including those who follow extremist content. The company also presents these advertisements in connection with posts that promote election disinformation. In the letter, Raoul and his fellow attorneys general urge the company to immediately halt these types advertisements while Washington, D.C. and state capitols around the country, including Springfield, Illinois, prepare for the risk of inauguration-related violence.

“We all watched in horror on January 6 as violent extremists – many dressed in military-grade tactical gear – laid siege upon the U.S. Capitol. Currently, Illinois and states throughout the nation are bracing for those same extremists who are now threatening violence against our state capitols,” Raoul said. “We know that these insurgents are relying on social media, and I am urging Facebook to stop targeting ads to individuals who incite violence and seek to overthrow our nation’s democracy.”

Facebook, headquartered in Menlo Park, California, is a social networking service founded in 2004 that allows users to share content online. Every day, more than half of the U.S. population older than the age of 13 uses Facebook services. The company makes money by selling advertising that it can target to its users based on personal data Facebook compiles.

Following the breach of the U.S. Capitol building on Jan. 6, Facebook permanently removed the president’s account for using the platform to “incite violent insurrection against a democratically elected government.” However, users that are believed to have an affinity for extremist content and election misinformation are continuing to post and receive targeted advertisements for military tactical gear, which could further promote and facilitate violent and politically motivated attacks.

Joining Raoul in sending the letter are the attorneys general of the District of Columbia, Massachusetts and New Jersey.



January 15, 2021

Will Castleberry  
Facebook Public Policy  
wcastleberry@fb.com

Dear Mr. Castleberry:

Following the appalling attack on the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, Facebook made public assurances that it is “treating these events as an emergency,” including by removing user-generated content encouraging criminal activity at the Capitol.<sup>1</sup> In light of warnings by the nation’s law enforcement of further attacks in the District of Columbia and across the country ahead of the inauguration of President-Elect Joseph Biden, our Office writes to urgently ask that Facebook take further proactive steps by removing advertising content that could encourage and enable political violence in the coming week. Specifically, *we request that the Company immediately place a moratorium on ads for weapons accessories and armor until January 22, 2021, or until such time as the heightened threat of extremist violence subsides.*

We expect and hope that Facebook is committed to taking all possible steps to minimize the use of its platform to incite political violence. Nevertheless, it has come to our attention through recent reporting that the Company is continuing to deploy its powerful targeted advertising capabilities to promote the sale of military tactical gear, including by serving ads for weapons accessories to Facebook user accounts that follow extremist content, and by presenting these ads in connection with posts that promote election misinformation viewpoints.<sup>2</sup> It has been widely reported that some of the rioters who perpetrated the January 6, 2021, attack wore military-style tactical gear in preparation for a confrontation. Particularly during this volatile time, we believe that Facebook’s microtargeted advertising of such gear, including to audiences that have an affinity for extremist content and election misinformation, could promote and facilitate further politically motivated attacks. Halting this advertising while the nation prepares to respond to an unprecedented

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<sup>1</sup> Facebook, Our Response to the Violence in Washington, January 6, 2021, <https://about.fb.com/news/2021/01/responding-to-the-violence-in-washington-dc/>.

<sup>2</sup> Ryan Mac and Craig Silverman, *Facebook Has Been Showing Military Gear Ads Next To Insurrection Posts*, January 13, 2021, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/ryanmac/facebook-profits-military-gear-ads-capitol-riot>.

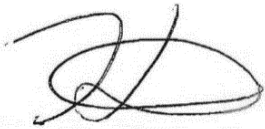
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domestic threat is a simple action that Facebook can take to support this response and to help prevent another emergency like the one the country experienced on January 6.

In the days following the events at the Capitol, Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg assured the public that Facebook does not profit from extremist content on its platform. Accordingly, we ask that Facebook stand behind this statement, and not give profit precedence over public safety, by temporarily removing advertising that could directly or indirectly contribute to further violent and insurrectionist activity.

Sincerely,



KARL A. RACINE  
District of Columbia Attorney General



KWAME RAOUL  
Illinois Attorney General



MAURA HEALEY  
Massachusetts Attorney General



GURBIR S. GREWAL  
New Jersey Attorney General