

ACLU Maryland

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Words matter.

Sometimes racism is subtle, as Dana Vickers Shelley, Executive Director of ACLU of Maryland, points out in a [recent OpEd](#) published in The Baltimore Sun. However, an inflammatory and offensive tweet dehumanizing Black children by the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) and other recent comments expressed by public leaders represent a disturbing return to overt racism.

Black children are children.

There is plenty of research out there showing that Black [girls](#) and [boys](#) experience “adultification bias” from a young age. This means that adults (school staff, police officers, elected officials, etc.) see children as older than they are, often leading to [disproportionate discipline](#) and more punitive treatment. Children of color, especially Black children, are often treated as presumptive suspects and criminals. These children are not getting the benefits of being viewed as children, and innocent. That was the clear intention of the FOP’s tweet when more Black children than usual were in the Inner Harbor on a recent weekend night. The FOP characterized them suspicious as a group and denied them the right to still be the children that they are. This is unacceptable.

The coded language public servants and elected officials use and the racist themes they invoke set the tone for what is acceptable. More than just not being negative, we need our leaders to see all the positivity we see in Black children, Black families and Black communities and to embrace it and name it whenever they can.

We call on all public officials to pledge that they will not use and will not tolerate the use of disparaging and dehumanizing language about people of color, especially Black children.

[Read the full OpEd here.](#)

BLACK CHILDREN ARE CHILDREN

SUPPORT BLACK KIDS

SHARE THE PLEDGE ON TWITTER

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American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland / Education

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