

Responding to Fraud Claims: Messaging Guidance

Partnership for Basic Needs | April 2026

Fraud should be taken seriously — but punishing families who have done no wrong by cutting their basic needs is the wrong answer. We can hold bad actors accountable and protect the people who depend on these programs. What doesn't work is taking billions of dollars away from children, parents, seniors, immigrants, and people with disabilities and calling it a fix.

Pivot: Accountability First, Then Harm

Step 1: Affirm accountability

Lead with a genuine commitment to program integrity and don't let fraud framing set the terms of the discussion. Acknowledge that fraud is a real concern and the shared value that everyone agrees fraud is wrong and that it should be addressed. Do not get drawn into a lengthy debate on fraud, nor dismiss, minimize, or call fraud claims "false" or "just a pretext."

Step 2: Pivot to harm

Immediately redirect to the human impact of blanket cuts. Who loses? Children, parents, seniors, veterans, people with disabilities, immigrants, and working families — people who did nothing wrong. These cuts don't target fraud, instead they punish everyone.

Step 3: Contrast with the right solutions

Point toward targeted accountability — going after bad actors and corporate fraudsters — rather than gutting entire programs. Be sure to pivot as soon as possible to the negative outcomes and harms of cutting basic needs programs to people (starvation, healthcare taken away, increased costs for families already struggling, etc.). Additionally, connect cuts to what they fund instead: tax breaks for the wealthy, ICE enforcement, and other spending priorities that voters of all stripes find harder to defend.

Dos and Don'ts

DO

DON'T

✓ Lead with a brief shared commitment to **accountability** and **integrity**. Acknowledge fraud is bad and then move on. Voters are more persuaded when we begin with this framing.

✗ Lead with "the fraud claims are false" or "just an excuse to cut." This **does not work** with moderates and/or persuadables. Do **not** get drawn into a lengthy debate on fraud.

✓ Pivot quickly to the harm that blanket cuts to basic needs programs inflict on people who did **nothing wrong**.

✗ Dismiss or label fraud concerns as **misleading** — it puts you on defense with persuadable voters.

✓ Contrast cuts with tax breaks for the wealthy, ICE deployment, and other unpopular spending priorities — this framing performs best with persuadable voters.	✗ Defend the status quo without pairing it with a call for improvement (i.e. holding fraudsters accountable).
✓ Name who loses: children, parents, seniors, veterans, people with disabilities, immigrants, and other eligible vulnerable populations.	✗ Use terms like "safety net," "anti-poverty," "benefits," or "the poor."
✓ Say these are programs that provide "assistance" that people need — not ones they "rely on" or "benefit from."	✗ Use overly sharp language like "corrupt" or "billionaires" — it backfires with persuadables.
✓ Use "basic needs programs" when referring to multiple programs.	✗ Let the conversation stay on fraud — always pivot to impact and harm to those who rely on basic needs programs.

Sample Pivots: Accountability First, Then Harm

Medicaid

The right response to integrity concerns is not to gut the program so severely that children, seniors, and people with disabilities lose coverage, including home care services that enable older adults and people with disabilities to remain in their homes. A sledgehammer does nothing to address fraud.

SNAP

We should hold fraudsters stealing SNAP benefits accountable, but we should not punish children and families by cutting the vital food assistance they depend on, especially amid rising grocery costs. Millions face food insecurity each year — punishing them by taking away a lifeline doesn't solve waste or abuse.

ACA / Health Coverage

While factual instances of fraud should be addressed, taking away millions of peoples' ability to afford the high cost of health coverage through the ACA marketplace and stripping them of their health care does nothing to address fraud. It just inflicts serious financial harm to families and communities.

Child Care

Taking away affordable child care does nothing to address fraud. Instead, it puts children at risk and forces parents out of work. The administration's funding freeze alone [could cost families \\$400 million in lost earnings.](#)