

December 7, 2021

Dear Commissioners of Charles County,

I am writing in opposition to the adoption of Resolution 2021-21 as a Health Ordinance in Charles County.

I was excited with the recent lifting of the mask mandate as it showed forward progress where the need for a State of Emergency was behind us. The COVID vaccine has been available now for long enough that everyone who wants it has received it. Hope was to restore the positive experience of having a close community and participating in the wonderful assets we have. I am not naive in my belief COVID was eliminated. Anticipated county health cases will continue to fluctuate and then stabilize throughout the seasons much like the flu.

The general population is grabbing anything to cover their face, not out of educating themselves on what face coverings can and cannot do, but out of fear. Fear is a natural response to an unknown virus. However, there are years of research, miles of data, and regulations that apply to face mask wearing. Grossly overstating the efficacy of masks during a respiratory disease outbreak actually puts people at much higher risk of catching SARS-CoV-2 since they believe donning masks will save them from an aerosolized virus.

Further, the back and forth of masks-on, masks-off is causing confusion, division, and exasperation in our community. A return to masks, perhaps permanently, sends a signal to the community that we are only going backward in this nearly 2-year nightmare rather than moving toward real normalcy.

My professional background is in the field of industrial hygiene where I served in both the private sector and federal government over a 30+ year span. My responsibility was to assess environmental hazards, health risk exposures and implement protective measures to include personal protective equipment (PPE). Regulations were adhered to for determining the best course of action. A few hazards addressed during my career include asbestos, lead (paint and firing ranges), polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB's), mercury, mold, anthrax, H1N1, legionella, cancer clusters.

At face value, asking or mandating everyone to wear a face covering seems minimally intrusive. However, there is a human cost. One must consider the actual effectiveness of masks, requirements for the wearing of masks and the real health implications for children and adults who have health conditions, depression or anxiety issues.

The most common face coverings today include cloth coverings, surgical masks, N95s, and face shields. Controlling a respiratory organism believed by virologists to be 0.125-0.3 microns in size, requires a tight fit to the face and a filter media capable of preventing inhalation. Protection using cloth or fabric coverings is inconceivable as the threading and loose fit allows significant

respiratory leakage. Use of such coverings will not stop the size of this small virus but is the least restrictive to breathing for the individual wearing it.

Surgical masks, commonly used by healthcare professionals, provide a slightly higher level of efficacy. They serve to protect against larger droplet transmission but they too fit loosely to the users face which may allow a significant fraction of airborne viruses to penetrate through and around the “filtering” material.

Commercial N95 masks were designed and distributed as a means for controlling particulates such as dust, pollen, and soot. The average diameter of dust is 10 microns. Although improvements have been made to the N95 filtering material, they still do not provide an expected protection against an organism the size of the COVID virus. There are precautions publicized for these filters to include: not to be worn by those with chronic respiratory, cardiac, or other serious medical conditions. Children and people with facial hair should not use these masks as the fit is jeopardized. Humid environments and conditions with airborne oils (i.e. shops, restaurants) break down efficiency as well. All the above are single use and should be properly disposed of.

So what is effective? Half face and full face respirators have the necessary fit and filter media. However, these referenced respirators are cumbersome to wear and designed for use in high hazard environments and not everyday use. They require a tight fit to be effective and are subject to additional requirements by OSHA such as regular fit testing, training (use, care and disposal) and annual medical surveillance.

I believe there are very good and decent medical and scientific professionals out there working hard to overcome Covid. There are so many facets relating to Covid. Sometimes you just have to think logically and rationally. At some point, I personally believe that time is now, we need to choose to move forward. Let kids be kids again. Let the people decide what method of protection is right for themselves. If you want to wear a mask, then wear a mask. If you want to stay home, away from any risk, then stay at home.

Personally, I have asthma which makes mask-wearing difficult at best and excruciating at worst. Wearing a mask severely restricts my breathing. I choose a cloth face covering to be a law-abiding citizen when/where masks are enforced. I must carry inhalers to minimize an attack. I have experienced harassment in stores when I have to pull down my face covering just to get enough oxygen. This causes anxiety each time I enter an establishment wondering if it will happen again. I have even stopped attending my church of choice despite my continued strong Christian belief. As a result, I expend more time and money to do business outside of the county where masks are not mandated and the people around me respect my personal decision to forego a mask.

The big question I have for our Health Department and county commissioners is if Covid is here to stay, what will be different six months, a year, 5-years from now, that will lead you to believe it will be the right time to stop trying to force everyone to wear a mask? The flu, which started as a pandemic in the United States early 1900s, has transformed itself each year (the Asian flu in 1953, Hong Kong Flu in 1968, the swine flu in 1976). After action research has proven mask wearing to be ineffective for virus transmission and flu shots continue as optional.

While we may disagree on whether masks even work at stopping the transmission of respiratory viruses but, we can agree that there are better and more effective ways to save lives in Charles County. Publicize common sense practices used to control viruses, such as hygiene and controlling trajectories resulting from sneezing/coughing and staying home when sick. Offer periodic health updates if necessary. Beyond that measure, are you really willing to fundamentally alter the way of life for all our community forever?

Commissioners, this regulation is bad for our county and bad for our future. I respectfully ask that you withdraw it from consideration or vote no on December 15.

Sincerely,

[Patricia Gretsky-Williams](#)

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