

Good morning, Commissioners. I have lived in this county for over 20 years. My husband and his entire family grew up here. Over the course of this time, we have watched many changes in our county, but none so invasive to our personal liberty as this mask resolution that you are so determined to turn into a law that you can impose on this beautiful community on a whim.

I moved here from Massachusetts. I left all my family and friends to be here with my husband and to raise our family here. I have learned to love it. I love being so close to the water. I love the seafood. I love the sense of community in Charles County. Whether you're in school or homeschooling, whether you're religious or not, there is a place for you here. If someone needs a group to commune with, you can be sure one will be formed. I have watched it happen. We are a very diverse group of people yet we all have a way of living with each other and respecting each other and it has been a pretty awesome thing to watch. I'm not so sure much of the country can say that about their community.

Then COVID hit. I saw unity and then division. I was in favor of putting my mask on when this all started. I spent an entire day making masks for my family so we could go out in public. I wanted to keep them safe as well as those around me. We were told they worked. So I made them. And then I waited for the restrictions to be lifted because I thought, "If they work, this is an easy solution and we should be fairly back to normal soon." I waited and I waited and I waited. It didn't happen. Then, and only then, did I start to doubt the leadership in this state, and subsequently this county. It was then I began to question everything.

We are a homeschooling family. When my kids reach high school age, they are eager to go to school. My two oldest have gone. One is a senior this year and has accepted the mask mandate so he can have somewhat of a senior year. He saw my daughter's senior year experiences swept out from under her. Senior night for softball? Gone. Graduation and award ceremonies to show her hard, hard work? Gone. Senior prom? Gone. Everything these kids have been able to have, including the lackluster graduation of 2020 was because of the push of parents. The county did not come in and try to give these kids what they deserved. They did it because their parents demanded it. If we hadn't, they would have literally received nothing their senior year. Everyone was scared because we didn't know a lot about the virus. But we know a lot about it now.

This is all affecting my homeschooling children as well. My son was involved in robotics and was SO HAPPY when he could take the mask off and enjoy his time with friends doing an activity he loved. Then they were mandated again and he quit. We were free, and then we weren't. We could just not go back to that oppression. My son also gained quite a bit of weight during the pandemic. He's 10 and he's overweight for his age. He's not a big sports kid so I'm always looking for something for him to get up and do. The Capital Clubhouse began offering classes recently, but we decided not to sign up because of the mask mandate. I will NOT send my child to a class that requires masks while he is exercising. So tell me, how is that healthy for the children in this county if they feel they cannot even go in a building to get the exercise they need to fight illnesses like COVID? It's not.

I go to other states and counties for my daughter's sporting events where there is no mandate. I always hate, and I mean hate, coming back here. It's not because I don't want to be in the home my husband and I built. It's because I don't want to come back to this oppressive county where we can't even decide for ourselves if we should put a piece of cloth on our face for "protection". I didn't want to do this, but I have even resorted to shopping outside of the county where I won't be harassed about a mask. And yes, I have been harassed. I have been harassed from 20 feet away.

It would be one thing if there was some data to support face coverings as an intervention that helps prevent the spread and severity of COVID. But there isn't any. There isn't any because it doesn't exist. I have seen the data. I look at it all the time. I have also watched your meetings. Not once has Dr. Abney given this community a good reason for this measure. The only reasons she gives are her own personal opinions. It has never been backed up by data. One might even say she has made false statements about masking. She stated that it has helped with the flu. Where is the data on that? And why aren't you asking? Maybe because there isn't any.

We are almost two years into this. Those who wanted the vaccine have received it. Those who don't, continue to live their lives the best they can and they do it in a responsible way. We do not need our commissioners to act as the health police. And we certainly don't need our commissioners to begin imposing fines on the community and sending the police out to enforce a mask mandate. It's ridiculous. I think our sheriff's office has a lot more pressing matters to attend to.

Therefore, my vote is definitely against your resolution.

Karen Cross