

I am opposed to the adoption of any Resolution Requiring the use of Masks (Face Coverings) as a Health Ordinance in Charles County. I am extremely disheartened and disappointed to see the continued use of County resources directed toward the imposition of masks on private citizens and private businesses.

St. Mary's, Calvert, Anne Arundel, Fairfax, and King George counties do not have mask mandates and there has been no significant difference in the trajectory of the pandemic in those regions compared to ours. 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 there is no way to move forward to normalcy. This action seems to be a stubborn refusal to know when a government action is unpopular and the Commissioners seem oblivious to the true desires of their constituents. This is no way to govern.

Our beautiful county should be known for our natural resources, welcoming citizens, and economic or educational opportunities. After two years of systematic dismantling of institutions we've come to rely on, I don't think that we can take another winter of restrictions. We cannot continue to be so singularly focused on disease mitigation to the detriment of other pressing matters in our county.

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. September 2021 was the fourth deadliest month for our jurisdiction, with masks in place. Wouldn't focus on early treatment be a much better use of the Commissioners' time and resources? Making the availability of monoclonal antibodies widespread, advising physicians of which steroid treatments help relieve stressed airways, or even allowing physicians to prescribe off-label treatments under the principle of "Right to Try" would all respect the dignity of the human beings in our community and show true good-faith efforts to shield the vulnerable from adverse outcomes of the disease.

The community would like the chance to offer differing opinions on productive mitigation, prevention, or treatment options for COVID-19. For instance, Dr. Abney continues to make the false claim that "masks are proven to stop influenza". She seems to not understand the phenomenon of viral interference as a reason why influenza saw record low rates last year (globally!). This in turn contributes to her, and by extension the Board of Commissioners, grossly overstating the efficacy of masks during a respiratory disease outbreak. This actually puts people at much higher risk of catching SARS-CoV-2 since they believe donning a cloth mask will save them from an aerosolized virus. The Board of County Commissioners should appeal to the advice of industrial hygienists and other mask experts as to the long-standing truth about the efficacy of all types of face coverings.

It has been nearly two years of restrictions, mask mandates, and general misery. The sense of community is lost. The trust in public health officials and our elected representatives is severely damaged. Implementing a mask mandate, passed with the force of law, right before Christmas seems punitive. Offering individuals a CHOICE to wear a mask is the only way to respect human freedom and understand your role as a representative. The Board of County Commissioners are supposed to implement the will of the people, not override it with their personal beliefs.

Masks have been debated for over 100 years as a tool for pandemics. In each previous pandemic, their use was disavowed after the fact or rejected completely. Why? Because there has not been a discernible benefit in cases, hospitalizations, or deaths. In the 1918 pandemic after report, face masks were determined to be useless. In the 2009 H1N1 after-action report, the NIH wrote no fewer than 4 times that anything less than a N95 mask was powerless against a respiratory virus like influenza. In fact, at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, masks were also rejected as a possible intervention because it was harder to teach the population at large how to properly use masks than it was to wash hands. There was a change, not in the data, but in the narrative in Spring and Summer 2020 when the public health officials at the CDC realized the failed policy of lockdowns and capacity restrictions did nothing to slow the spread of this highly infectious virus. You will not find one study conducted pre-COVID which show masks as efficacious against influenza-like illnesses. There was only 1 randomized control trial (RCT) in 2015 on the use of cloth masks (A cluster randomized trial of cloth masks compared with medical masks in healthcare workers - PMC (nih.gov)) which showed that healthcare workers wearing cloth masks were actually infected at HIGHER rates than the control group or the variable group. There have been only 2 RCTs done on masks DURING the current pandemic. The Danmask study which should no statistically significant reduction in transmission between the mask and control group and the Bangladesh study which should a paltry 10% risk reduction which translated to 11% decreased transmission with surgical masks and 7% in cloth masks. Is 10% effect on transmission a reasonable outcome for a population-level measure like forced masking? Would Dr. Abney or her colleagues give a treatment to a patient with only a 10% chance of a positive outcome? This is the true, authentic data concerning masks. Not the nonsensical comparing of case rates to our neighboring counties at random intervals that can prove or disprove mask efficacy from day-to-day.

I am a born and bred Charles County resident. I have lived here my entire life. My husband has a business in this county. We are raising our family here. I am telling you that mask mandates, the state of emergency, and all the pandemic restrictions have hurt county businesses and residents. I no longer shop, conduct business, or eat at restaurants in this county. I take my money and business to St. Mary's, Calvert, or King George. My

family has even changed our place of worship to a church in St. Mary's county. I readily 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.

For my family we have found masks to not be just a nuisance, but also a health risk that we are not willing to take. We have many children who are at a vulnerable age where their body and minds are still growing. Cognitive function is affected by the amount of oxygen (or lack thereof) and the amount of carbon dioxide (or excess thereof) that one's body receives. The long-term cognitive function health risks related to prolonged use of masks in children for extended periods of time are completely unknown and have not been studied.

My children's health has been adversely affected by the constant forced use of masks. My children would be classified as healthy, active children. They are in the lower percentiles for weight and are not considered obese. Not a single one has had underlying, simple health complications, such as asthma, that could be a catalyst for a bona fide medical exemption. However, all of my children have shown signs of oxygen depletion or carbon monoxide poisoning, such as increases in headaches / migraines, dizziness, confusion / loss of the ability to focus, turning pale / about to pass out, increased irritability, and emotion outbreaks. These health complications only arise after prolonged mask usage. For example, by Thursday and Friday afternoon of a full week of school, these symptoms are present. Whereas, usually by Monday morning, after a weekend of not having to use a mask, symptoms have subsided.

My one son has had migraines and headaches regularly enough, in addition to coming out of school pale most days, that we have since gone through the process with our pediatrician to evaluate him and obtain a medical exemption from the mask. Another of my sons has had emotion meltdown due to anxiety over the mask requirements. So much so that one day when he forgot his own mask, I had to take him home from school drop off because of the fear that has been instilled in him over wearing a mask, and he was afraid he would get in trouble if he had to use one from the school.

The mask mandate issue has caused division in our previous place of worship, among the community at the school where my children attend, and within some of my own family members. These types of regulations are a detriment to our county's community and society that has had a rich history of coming together for one another.

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.