Dear Charles County Commissioner's,

I took the opportunity to watch the Special Meeting you held on Wednesday, December 29th to hear from our county health and school officials on the status of COVID in the county and their recommendations. Upon hearing the current status and recommendations, I am quite upset that once again, the Board is trying to legislate an end to the COVID virus, when clearly, this is not possible. A mandatory mask mandate in Charles County would actually serve no benefit whatsoever in the fight against COVID and the proof of this is in the numbers presented by Dr. Abney, Jason Stoddard, and what is happening throughout the country.

In her presentation, Dr. Abney reported COVID death numbers in Charles County as being 15 in October, 7 in November, and 2 in December, so far, for a total of 270 deaths since COVID was first reported. We have not even been through a full month of lifting the last mask mandate and yet we have continued to witness a drop in deaths while positive cases are on an upward curve due to Omicron becoming the pre-dominant strain. As mentioned, the county has seen 270 deaths based on 18,070 positive cases. This makes for a current 1.49% death rate and a 98.51% recovery rate. The United States average death rate is 1.55% with a 98.45% recovery rate. In Charles County itself, only 10.84% of the population has tested positive for COVID. These are hardly numbers that should scream out panic like the media and certain politicians are constantly selling. COVID is a virus, and viruses flourish and spread until a vaccine that stops their transmission or makes them dormant inside a host is created and distributed to the majority of a population. This is how we were able to end viruses such as polio and smallpox to name a few.

It is well published by the CDC and scientists around the world that omicron is more contagious than past variants. We need to stop over-reacting to positive testing numbers and instead be concerned with preventing the deaths of our citizens. This can be accomplished through more rapid and accurate testing allowing those truly positive to stay home, ensuring our hospitals have the staff to treat patients in the Emergency Room in a timely manner and relocate them to long term care faster to clear up available beds (as discussed by the Charles Regional Representative), protect our most vulnerable population with the vaccine and masks if they desire them, and ensure we have the latest anti-biotics and other treatments available in ample supply for the worst of our COVID patients. And while I believe vaccination can help in this regard, we need to stop pushing the narrative that it is the end all for the COVID pandemic. It is quite clear from the rising numbers of vaccinated testing positive for COVID (everyone I personally know who is positive with COVID today has been vaccinated), the continued spread of the virus amongst the public, and vaccinated deaths, that the vaccine is not as effective as vaccines we have received in the past that eradicated the virus they were meant to protect us from.

Mr. Stoddard reported that our schools have had an increase in COVID cases. We have seen select schools shut down or return certain grades to virtual learning for a few days due to an increase in COVID positive cases among students and teachers. The school spike appears to begin on December 13th with a total of 916 students and 195 staff testing positive since then. This surge in positive cases would once again appear to be due to the Omicron variant. We continue to see school cases rise and more children and staff requiring quarantine even though there is a mandatory mask mandate in all schools since the school year began on August 30th. For the entire school day, except for lunch and recess, students and teachers are required to wear masks. If masks prevent the spread of COVID, why are we

forcing children to quarantine that may have come into contact with a COVID positive child or staff member? The mask should be protecting them, correct? After all, that is the basis for Dr. Abney's recommendation that you are deciding on whether to mandate masks again is that it is a protective measure against the spread if COVID.

So, we have evidence that teachers and our children in school being masked up doesn't prevent the spread of COVID. Even though the county mask mandate expired 30 November, every store and restaurant you go to in the county, you are most likely still seeing 50 – 85% of people wearing masks. If masks worked, once again, how is the county seeing a huge surge in COVID positive cases when a majority of the people you come into contact with in stores are still masked? But please, don't just take our numbers into account on why masks don't work, let's look at New York City. New York City has had one of the most restrictive COVID policies in all of America. Masks are 100% mandatory for all indoor locations and for outdoor activities where large crowds gather and social distancing is not possible. Everyone five years old and up must show proof of vaccination before being able to enter any restaurant, library, museum, shopping center, etc. And yet, New York City reported an average of 20,743 daily cases in the last 7 days whereas the daily average the 28 previous days was 9,563. In just 13 days, their positivity rate rose from 6.34% to 22.49%. Masks and restrictions do not work! How about another example. In October, before Omicron, there was a study done between COVID cases in Orange County and Los Angeles County in California when Delta was the main variant. Orange County had no mask restrictions while Los Angeles County had a strict mask mandate policy since July. On October 5th, Orange County (no masks) had a 5 per 100,000 case rate compared to Los Angles County's (mask mandatory) 9 per 100,000 people case rate. The two counties had identical hospitalization numbers (6 per 100,000) and similar vaccination rates. Masks do not work! The 7-day average for Florida (masks not required) is 13.8% while New York (mask mandate since December 13th) is 14.6%. So, Florida with no mask mandate and approximately 2,175,117 more citizens than New York are seeing less COVID positive cases.

Clearly, masks, especially mask mandates, are not the solution that will end COVID exposure in our county. We are all responsible adults. Pre-COVID, we made decisions on a daily basis that placed us at risk but we always were able to weigh that risk ourselves and decide for ourselves what risk was worth taking and which ones were not. Likewise, as parents, it is our responsibility to weigh the risks and determine what is best for our children. Absent a mask mandate, anyone who wants to wear a mask can freely do so. Anyone who wants to get vaccinated has more than ample resources to do so. Those who choose not to do either of those things, especially when the risk includes a 98.45% nation-wide recovery rate, shouldn't be villainized and should be able to make their own risk decisions free of government interference. That recovery rate is still much better than most cancers! The role of the county government is to supply the resources needed to end the pandemic; not limit the choices we have that determine how we live our lives!

Thank you!