



Testimony: Montgomery County Medical Society Urges Continued Restrictions to Keep Our People Safe from COVID-19 and Its Variants

The Montgomery County Medical Society respectfully encourages continued restrictions to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the County. Montgomery County's physicians have witnessed first-hand the physical and mental devastation caused by the pandemic, among our patients, our colleagues, and our neighbors, and therefore we feel a particular obligation to share our views in the interest of public health.

We agree wholeheartedly with Background Items 2 through 14, with the minor correction that only 10%, not 18%, of County residents have been fully vaccinated, based on the County's Covid-19 Information Portal, as of March 10, 2021.

And as we all know, the portion of minority residents who have been vaccinated is far lower, and as a result of this and other longstanding inequities, they continue to remain at higher risk of serious COVID illness. Unfortunately, the supply of vaccinations remains inadequate and unpredictable.

Adding to the risk are the emergence of COVID variants B.1.1.7, P.1, and B.1.3.5.1. As noted in the Resolution, Montgomery County is the only jurisdiction in Maryland with confirmed cases of all three Covid-19 variants. Well-respected experts such as Dr. Michael Osterholm have predicted that the emergence of variants, in particular the B.1.1.7, will cause a surge in COVID-19 cases in the United States in coming weeks. This is already happening now in Europe, despite lockdown restrictions in many countries, including France, Italy, and Spain.

We believe that the ONLY reason that Montgomery County has been successful in keeping rates of infection lower compared to its neighboring jurisdictions is precisely because it has remained vigilant with its local restrictions. At this time, until vaccination is more widespread, we feel that any relaxation of restrictions will be counterproductive to our goal of defeating COVID, and lead to more unnecessary illnesses, hospitalizations, and deaths.

We strongly advise against ANY further reduction in our vigilance against COVID-19 until more of us are vaccinated and the number of cases and hospitalizations are at much lower levels.

We are close to the end of a very difficult marathon. To get to the finish line, we must put the health of the people of Montgomery County first by being vigilant and continuing to impose restrictions which are based on science.