

County Council,

As a business owner and resident of this county, frankly, I'm sadly reserved that this hearing is all but a formality. My hope is that there are some of you that recognize that the people and businesses of this county have sacrificed (and suffered) more-so than probably anywhere in this country over the past 18 months and somebody will speak up for us and at least bring a healthy conversation of what implementing indoor masks mandates truly mean.

I am lucky. I am running a Hockey Camp at Rockville Ice Arena this week. If the mask mandate was implemented this week, I would lose dozens of kids and thousands of dollars. Camp operator next week is already in a full panic on what will happen to him. All these kids will just go play hockey in another county where they wouldn't have to wear a mask, like they did all Fall/Winter. All my coaches are vaccinated, and kids are free to mask if they want, we probably have 40-50% kids that their parents have chosen to mask, kids are choosing to get dressed outside rather than poorly ventilated locker rooms still. People are being cautious but they still don't want to play in a mask for hours.

Private Ice Rinks will lose tens of thousands of dollars a month with mask mandates with parents simply deciding to take their kids to other counties. I am an active member of Solidcore gyms in Wildwood and Bethesda as well as Yoga and other activities. High intensity workouts with a mask are miserable and I will not attend their classes until mask mandate is lifted.

I have several high school friends in town this weekend, depending on the guidance we were going to Tommy Joe's this weekend, now we are likely to just go to Arlington.

Mask Mandates put an incredible burden on businesses that have already sacrificed so much, and many are on the brink and do very little to curb transmission and just push people's business to other counties.

Saying, "It's just a mask" or "Masks get us back to normal quicker" is an insult to our intelligence and to businesses who are negatively impacted by mask mandates.

I would love the county to address to following questions;

Mask Mandates

- Will you add provisions in the order that when county reverts back to moderate and/or low transmission mask mandates are removed ***immediately***?
- Has the county ever considered the cost-benefit of mask mandates and the toll it has on local businesses or simply zero covid the goal?
- Is the considering simply *recommending* mask mandates and letting the people and businesses of Montgomery County simply assess risk and make decisions for themselves? NYC recently just indoor masking recommendation rather than a mandate. It seems like Mayor Bowser is treating her mandate as recommendation as well.
- Will the county consider putting some nuance to the mask mandate? By that I mean, we are the most vaxxed county in the country so comparing our potential situation to Alabama or Louisiana is disingenuous. Make mask mandates for "essential" businesses such as grocery stores, banks, pharmacies, etc. and again let people make decisions for themselves at gyms, ice rinks, restaurants?

- Does the country really feel indoor mask mandates will really drive down transmission if Northern Virginia and neighboring counties do nothing?

Hospitalizations

- Simply, Why is this not the benchmark? 18 months ago, the goal was to prevent hospitals from overflow. I would reiterate, we know vaccines work very well, so to imply we could end up like Southern States is disingenuous at best, callous at worst.
- Can the County provide accurate hospitalization numbers? It seemed like we had less than 20 people hospitalized either with and/or from Covid in a county with over 1 million people.
- Can the County start separate WITH and From Covid hospitalizations? Currently, anyone who is hospitalized who subsequently tests positive from Covid even if asymptomatic is considered a Covid hospitalization.

End Game

- We have been at this for 18 months. We have had 6 weeks of “normal” in this county. Vaccines are working, cases and severe outcomes have completely decoupled. Are “cases” seriously going to be the benchmark going forward? Covid is going to be around for years, maybe forever, is the county prepared to indefinitely keep restricting private businesses and citizens how to live their every day life?
- Is it the county councils job to tell private businesses and residents how to live their daily lives and effect livelihoods?

Thank you,

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