

January 13, 2022

Esteemed Councilmembers,

I write to you in strong opposition to the proposed county vaccination requirements to enter bars, restaurants, fitness centers and other covered establishments (“vaccine passports”). There are three main reasons why the councilmembers should reconsider this well-intentioned but deeply troubling policy.

First, the vaccine passport policy should not include fitness centers. Fitness centers and gyms are *not* mere recreation or entertainment facilities. Exercise is as necessary to robust health as sound sleep and nutritious food. To deny people access to gyms – for vaccination status or any other reason – is in fact to intentionally damage their bodies. If it implements this policy, the Council will in fact be saying to the public: “You will comply with our public health goals or we will retaliate by intentionally damaging your health.” Such a stance would be unethical, self-contradictory, and draconian.

Second, this policy fails to account for the role of natural immunity and individual medical circumstances by imposing a “one size fits all” mandate. Real life, however, is more nuanced. Does the Council *actually* know that a young, healthy person with a documented infection plus *one* dose of vaccine should be *forced* to receive a second? Should a 20-year-old with a previous covid exposure be *forced* into the same vaccination rubric as an 80-year-old with multiple comorbidities? Is the Council actually accounting for the *costs* as well as the benefits of this policy? A 35-year old friend of mine, in perfect health, recently developed shingles – at 35! – as a side-effect from a covid booster. I myself had a difficult 10-day natural covid infection before the vaccines were available, and the months-later required vaccine dose gave me the highest fever I’ve ever had in my life and nearly sent me to the ER. There are costs, known and unknown, to *forcing* these injections on people. Is the council accounting for those costs, or is it simply laying down a crude, indiscriminating, not-narrowly-tailored mandate without due consideration for nuances, details, and scientific uncertainty? Moreover, once the Council sets the precedent of vaccine passports and opens this door (*i.e.* once it subjects people’s personal decisions about their own bodies to the impulses of a public majority vote), it likely will only be a matter of time before booster requirements will be added – one booster, then two, then who knows how many more to placate mass hysteria? And why stop at covid vaccines, when there are so many other actually beneficial regulations that could be forced onto people’s bodies to improve public health?

Finally, the covid passport policy should be rejected because it is authoritarian. This policy says, “We the County Council do not care about your consent. We do not care about your reasons or your thinking. We will simply *force* you to do what we want because we know with absolute certitude what is best.” This dangerous illiberal tendency – which at the moment is growing frighteningly on the political left – should be rejected, because history suggests that it never works out well in the end. Human beings are fallible, and for that reason *decentralized* decision making – whether in the economy or in health – yields the best outcomes by letting individual actors make the right decisions based on all known information and the specifics of their own cases – specifics that centralized mandates cannot account for.

Of course, it is possible that the US Supreme Court will strike down “vaccine passports” as unconstitutional anyway, and it is likewise possible that the county, lacking sovereign immunity, will be opening itself to manifold litigation and liability by de facto compelling people to incur known and unknown costs of unnecessary vaccinations; however, the best reason to reject this policy proposal is that *forcing* rather than persuading is rarely the right road to take in a free and democratic society.

Respectfully,

Chris A. Lee
Rockville