Rockville, MD 20852

January 17th, 2022

Montgomery County Council
Council Office Building
100 Maryland Ave., 6th Floor
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear Councilmembers,

In this letter, I add my testimony to the proposed vaccine passport for Montgomery County. In short, I am a MoCo resident, a pharmaceutical process engineer, and a lifelong Democrat--and I am against vaccine passports and vaccine mandates on multiple different levels of analysis.

First and foremost, vaccine passports have shown no ability to stop the spread of SARS-CoV-2. Between France (7/21, OWID data), Italy (8/6, OWID data), New York City (9/13, trend), and Los Angeles (11/8, trend)--among many, many others—there is not a single success story that shows that the passports were able to reduce spread, especially after the appearance of the Omicron variant. This pattern will continue, as SARS-CoV-2 has a mutation rate (*Nature)* on the same order of magnitude as the flu, albeit lower. We have already seen first-hand that this mutation rate is enough to cause vaccine escape—it took less than one year of mutation to find a strain capable of bypassing our best vaccine. That will continue to happen again and again, despite our attempts to thwart fundamental forces of biology, especially as dogs, cats (CDC), and deer (UMN) are also reservoirs of the virus.

Second, the cohort of people that are *both* unvaccinated or uninfected is incredibly low. Across the country, 92% of people in the US are seropositive for SARS-CoV-2 by either vaccination or infection (CDC, Oct 21, Combined, Study Wide). If we *truly* believe that pinpointing this 8% of the country will make everything better, I'd like to point out that 300 thousand people in Maryland have been infected between 12/1 and today, representing 5% of the state's population...and that's without considering that many used at-home tests and did not report positives to health authorities. All that in a few weeks. Also, it should be noted that the CDC estimates we miss about 71% of all infections, so you can draw your own conclusions. Even Dr. Fauci believes that most everyone will get Covid now (CNN).

 And if the concern is hospital burden, I have to ask, why are we focusing on everyone? Following the Pareto principle, most hospitalizations and deaths occur in the elderly and infirm. In the most recent data out of the UK government's weekly vaccine surveillance reports (Week 2), the difference in hospitalization rate for unvaccinated 18-29 year olds was only 6 hospitalizations/100,000 individuals/4 weeks (compared to vaccinated). In Montgomery County terms, that equates to about 9 saved hospitalizations of the same age group in a month (assume 14% of total population). What's the equivalent in those over 80? In the UK, that's 242/100,000 individuals/4 weeks, and MoCo an equivalent 101 hospitalizations a month saved, even only using an estimated 4% of the county's population. Current hospitalization rates show 70+ year olds being hospitalized at a 6X higher rate than 18-29 year olds (CDC). I am by no means blaming the elderly, but the point has to be made that once the most at-risk people are vaccinated, the returns become rapidly marginal.

I also heard mention of potentially requiring the passport to require boosters as well, since two doses do little to stop spread of Omicron. This is a dangerous path. Last week, the European Medicines Agency

cautioned against fourth booster doses and boosting every four months as it "...would not represent a sustainable long-term strategy" and "hypothetically poses the risk of overloading people's immune systems and leading to fatigue in the population" ([Reuters](#)). I really don't think the County Council wants to assume the role of jumping headlong into mandating boosters, being liable to the public as the technical reviewers of vaccine research, as the research is still being collected and debated on even the third booster. Mind you, Pfizer and Moderna are coming up with new vaccines *anyway* since they know that Omicron has largely escaped the vaccine with regards to spread and symptomatic infections.

Finally, these passports are incredibly unpopular and will only serve to hurt the state Democratic Party in the gubernatorial and senatorial races this year. I don't think anyone in their right mind thinks that this will win over Independents or Republicans this year, and I do not think that ditching the vaccine passport plan will send Democrats over to the other side. Most people I know are over Covid at this point--they've been vaccinated, they caught Omicron, and now they wonder "What's the point?" Why do I have to show my papers everywhere when 95% of the country doesn't have to? Not implementing passports will not be a primary issue, and if it is, it will represent a small subset of the county. Also, and coming from someone that is generally pro-vaccine, no one wants the *county government* ruling on what medical procedures should be performed on them. As a liberal, this is anathema. Furthermore, this is too broad a power to give over to any legislative body. By this logic, a legislative body can mandate any medical procedure or restriction as a matter of public health, which can be used to significantly impinge on freedoms, even if those freedoms are vices. Smokers are at more risk to Covid-19 than non-smokers—does the county wish to ban smoking? Overweight and obese individuals are also at more risk to Covid than those who are not—does the county wish to ban fast food and alcohol? Goodbye voters. And furthermore, do we wish to stigmatize these people, causing them to dig in their heels, potentially even to *all* vaccines? That is a scary thought, and will only turn people away to parties that will stop the restrictions. Remember, Prohibition didn't go well, and this is only more fuel for a "red wave" like what happened in Virginia last year. Don't let Dems be the "Papers Please" party.

There is no good that comes from this. The real-world data on Covid passports is very bad, and the benefit to the healthcare system could be minimal, especially since Omicron itself is a 53% risk *reduction* for hospitalization, 74% risk *reduction* for ICU admission, and **91% less risk of death** in a pre-print from [Kaiser Permanente](#) that was deemed good enough to tweet by CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky ([Twitter](#)). This county...this country...this planet has suffered far enough over the past two years, and despite our best efforts, we still got stuck with a variant that spreads to even the boosted, such as County Executive Elrich. And if Omicron gets displaced by a more infectious variant, then who are we kidding ourselves to think that more restrictions are going to fix things next time?

This is not admitting defeat. **We won**. We held out for a year, got a vaccine which saved millions of lives from more lethal variants, and now have a variant which is significantly weaker for everyone. But we need to move on. Most people I know, including most Democrats, have. We go to bars, restaurants, gyms, and movies. We take buses, trains, and planes. We handshake, hug, and smile. Omicron is beginning to wane and spring is right around the corner—let us be patient and resolute, we can handle this without vaccine passports.

I'd love to write more, but I feel I've said more than enough. Thank you all for your consideration.

Best regards,
Robert McGrane