

Dear Council.

My name is Rhoya Didden and I am a life-long resident of Montgomery County. I am strongly opposed to the proposed vaccine requirement to enter most covered public spaces in Montgomery County.

I ask you, however, to regard me not as your opposition, but as someone who likely shares many of your goals—goals for a society that is healthier, more equitable, and more prosperous for more of our fellow citizens. Unfortunately, this proposed resolution will produce the opposite effect in each of these categories.

First of all, this resolution would create a false sense of security around the covid-19 virus. I have heard the council say that it wants people to feel comfortable eating in restaurants, knowing that everyone inside is vaccinated against covid-19. This reasoning is extremely irresponsible, particularly now as the latest mutations of the virus evade the vaccines. Many people I know who are vaccinated and boosted are getting—and spreading—this virus. Under this resolution, a vaccinated person who is carrying the virus can freely sit near me at a restaurant for hours, but an unvaccinated person who has recently recovered from the virus and is therefore *not* a carrier cannot. This is folly, and for our most vulnerable residents—the aged and immunocompromised—potentially dangerous.

Secondly, this resolution would reduce equity in our county. Essentially, the council would create two classes of society—and would do so only to mislead the public into believing that it is safe from covid for the reasons I just stated. Do you want to segregate not only our residents, but the family members, friends, and tourists from out of town? Do you want families to be excluded from society? Is the goal merely to punish the unvaccinated? Perhaps segregation is your intention. However, it is difficult to justify such a discriminatory resolution within the parameters that I stated in my first reason for opposing it.

Finally, this resolution would prevent businesses from prospering. Not only would business owners lose revenue that they would normally receive from neighboring cities, but a vaccine mandate would force business owners to become bouncers, kicking people out or denying them access. People do not want to do this. It would create an even more fragmented society than the one in which we already live. Business owners have already suffered over the past two years—this would punish them even more. Our small businesses act as the backbone of our county; please do not place this burden upon their shoulders.

I would like to close by stating that laws always have consequences—consequences for those who must follow, consequences for the enforcers, and consequences for those who are ultimately responsible for their creation. I ask you to each carefully consider each set of those consequences, and not only what it would mean for us as residents, but what it would mean for you, as well.

Thank you very much for reading my testimony.

Be well,
Rhoya Didden