

I am reaching out to share thoughts about the proposed vaccine passport in Montgomery County. As an unvaccinated resident, I would like to share my perspective in the hopes that it will help you to understand at least one person's reasons for remaining unvaccinated, at this point in the pandemic. Those who are unvaccinated against COVID - 19 are often vilified by the media and government officials. We are characterized as being "anti-science", selfish, and ignorant. We are blamed for the spread of the disease and the deaths of people we've never met.

But the reality is, many of us are unvaccinated or partially vaccinated because we do not feel that it is the proper medical decision for our bodies. This is my reasoning: I have a cardiac condition that has caused me to be hospitalized three times over the past ten years. Thankfully, this condition is mild and I am extremely healthy. But I do occasionally have worrisome symptoms that need to be evaluated by a doctor. When this occurs, I am almost always screened for blood clots, heart attack and myocarditis. Because of this condition, and the link between covid vaccination and these cardiac symptoms, I choose not to be vaccinated. Especially considering that I have already had and recovered from COVID-19. I thought surely that this medical history would qualify me for a medical exemption from the vaccine. But several doctors have told me that it does not. Because my cardiac condition did not develop as a result of a COVID - 19 vaccine and I am not allergic to any of the components of the vaccine, the CDC still advises that I should be vaccinated. My doctors' recommendations have been to get the vaccine and then monitor my cardiac symptoms. I feel strongly that this is not in my best interests.

I am sure that many people can relate to having a differing opinion from their medical provider. In any other circumstance, I would have the freedom to choose a different medical path than my doctor suggests, without suffering a loss of freedom in the other areas of my life. In any other circumstance my medical decision would not invite judgment on my moral character. I know that I am not the only person in our county facing this situation. I feel strongly that a difference in opinion from a doctor, about very personal medical decisions, should not limit a person's freedom. When I talk with individuals about this I have found that nearly all of them agree with this perspective, even though they may at face value support vaccine requirements. Unfortunately, many people are not engaging in these conversations and so, vaccine mandates and requirements are pushed further along and those who disagree with them are further silenced.

The argument has been made that not being vaccinated is not a personal decision and that it in fact poses a threat to other community members. This argument is used to justify my, and others, exclusion from certain public places. However, we have seen over the past several months that vaccination does little to prevent infection and transmission. It does well to prevent hospitalization and death, as does natural immunity. In our county, vaccination rates are at 85%. Our hospitals are at "low utilization" levels. Our case rates are dropping. Our access to early at home testing is increasing. Countries around the world are ending their vaccine mandates and the courts are ruling against mandates again and again. With markers like this, and numbers

moving in a positive direction, a vaccine requirement will only serve to exclude community members and put an unnecessary burden on business owners.

There is currently approximately a 10% difference between full and partial vaccination in our county. I have to imagine that many of the people in that gap have chosen not to receive a second dose because of their reaction to the first dose. Perhaps their reaction was not severe enough to warrant a medical exemption, which are extremely difficult to obtain. However, many people experienced high fevers, painful body aches, debilitating headaches, lingering arm pain, among other reactions, after their first dose. By requiring full vaccination to enter certain establishments, those individuals are effectively told that their experiences were not meaningful and their decisions about their health are not their own.

Furthermore, to require that children from the age of 5 be fully vaccinated against COVID - 19 in order to enter certain establishments is particularly concerning. Parents are raising children and making decisions for them in one of the most difficult periods of recent history. We are tasked with protecting their physical health, strengthening their mental health, providing enriching experiences despite closures and quarantines, facilitating their education while facing a myriad of restrictions, and so much more. So many of us are worried that the current COVID-19 vaccines may present more health concerns than they prevent. Both scientific and anecdotal evidence suggest that these concerns are warranted. Many countries are limiting their vaccination of young children or halting their vaccine rollout for younger age groups because of the side effects that these vaccines are shown to cause. For a group that is so unlikely to become seriously ill with COVID - 19, a vaccine requirement seems like an unnecessary burden to lay on families, who are already faced with so much.

Imagine this scenario - A young family, who has had COVID and recovered, has decided not to vaccinate their 6 year old. The parents are vaccinated. The family is planning to eat dinner at a restaurant to celebrate a grandparent's birthday. With the proposed vaccine requirements, they would need to either not attend, or have the child stay back with a sitter or parent. That type of scenario will play out again and again if this requirement is adopted. The pandemic has already taken so much from our children. Why introduce mandates that will continue to negatively impact them, when the risk to their health from COVID - 19 is less than the risk from RSV or other childhood viruses.

Of course, DC and many other cities have put vaccine requirements in place. And yes, those requirements have caused vaccination rates to increase slightly. However, those cities still experienced the highest case rates that they've seen in the pandemic thus far. Their hospitals were still treating very many sick patients. Their death rates still increased. In light of that, Montgomery County needs to consider what its goal is. Are we only trying to increase vaccination rates or are we trying to prevent people from becoming severely ill and dying? If the goal is to improve health outcomes from COVID - 19 for Montgomery County residents then the Department of Health and Human Services would do better to recognize natural immunity, educate the public on lifestyle choices that could protect their health, and focus more efforts on improving access to treatments. I hope that the county will rethink the vaccine requirement and

instead focus on how we can live with this virus, without imposing further hardships on our community members and businesses.