

To Whom it May Concern,

My name is Zach Dresher, and I am a resident of Silver Spring, in Montgomery County. On behalf of myself and my household, I strongly implore the Montgomery City Council to institute a vaccination requirement policy for all indoor spaces currently being debated.

It is of no question that Covid-19 has absolutely decimated our society. From daily rising death, hospitalization, and case counts nationwide, to the enormous economic impact, this virus has forever changed this country as we know it. The question now, as we're about to enter our third year of the pandemic, is whether we as a community will do what is truly necessary to mitigate the spread, and decrease these numbers. There is undeniable scientific evidence showing that vaccination, while not entirely preventing the spread of the virus, is a necessary tool to combat it's devastating nature.

Vaccinated individuals have a significantly lower risk of hospitalization or death, according to the latest CDC studies. Furthermore, vaccinated individuals who do become infected with covid have a consistently lower viral load than the unvaccinated, meaning that they are less likely to spread this horrible disease. Vaccines are shown to have minimal side effects outside of a 48 hour period by most individuals, and have been deemed safe for all individuals age 5 and higher. Yet, we live in a society where misinformation and lies are being spread by politicians and news organizations, who feel that individual "liberty" is worth more than the lives of human beings.

Let's make this clear. It is not. The foundation of American democracy is based on the concept of a Social Contract; the idea that individuals forgo a portion of their liberty, in order to live in harmony and peace with each other. This is the same reason why murder is illegal in a civilized society, because we as a collective understand that one person's desire, or dare I say, liberty, to kill another human being is less important than the life that would be lost. There is no mistake about the matter- unvaccinated people are a danger to themselves and others. We don't allow drunk people to drive, because we recognize that when they get behind the wheel, their judgment is impaired, and they are a danger to those around them. Not following through with this mandate proposal is the equivalent of letting someone "drunk with misinformation" take the wheel, and drive right into your favorite downtown establishment.

With this said, governance cannot occur solely based on questions of morality. The economic impact of this vaccination mandate must be considered, and I'd like to submit my personal experience as evidence in favor of this proposal. I am a longtime member of the service industry, having bartended within the DC/MD area for the last seven years. Most recently, I have been working at an establishment in downtown Washington DC, which has required proof of vaccination since August of 2021.

Despite what others may lead you to believe, our vaccine mandate has actually increased our business, by a significant margin. Since this policy was instituted, almost EVERY SINGLE DAY, a customer has made it a point to tell me how thankful they are that we are requiring

vaccination. People have been afraid to go out, even after being vaccinated, because they know they will be exposed to those who have chosen not to. Yet, in a space solely occupied by vaccinated individuals, these fears are lessened, and people feel free to spend their money and contribute to the local economy. In reality, the lack of mandate is what's hurting businesses, as these same individuals tell me that they will not, out of either principal or safety concerns, attend dining spaces that do not have vaccination mandates.

In the five months so far that we have required vaccination status for entry, our profits as a business have seen a consistent and steady increase, at least until Omicron began. Even then however, January is typically the slowest month of the year in the service industry (a fact that those on any side of this debate with knowledge on the matter can agree on), and we anticipate that by February or March, things will resume to their normal levels. Our experience with dissenters has been minimal; outside of a few negative comments on our facebook page, we haven't had a single in-person issue with the institution of this mandate. In terms of actual implementation, there has been literally no issue whatsoever. As a bartender, I'm required to check everyone's ID to ensure that they're 21 before I serve them alcohol. It takes approximately three additional seconds to also look at a vaccine card, and match the name, which is less time than it took you to read this paragraph.

Furthermore, allowing unvaccinated indoor dining puts at stake the lives of those working in this industry. You've heard from business owners who claim that they cannot find people to fill open jobs, and that a mandate would make that even harder. I contest that this is a cause-and-effect logical fallacy. In truth, many members of the service industry simply do not want to go back into work and expose themselves to the unvaccinated, for the same reason that we are seeing nurses and doctors quit their jobs nationwide. Several people I know personally fit into this category- longtime service industry professionals, who have quit their jobs in Maryland, and moved to locations in Washington DC which require vaccination, so they can get back to their careers and still feel safe doing so.

It is important to mention as well that most service industry jobs do not include health benefits for their employees, and it is morally abhorrent to expect people to put themselves at this risk, without even the security of knowing they can visit a doctor if they experience symptoms without a side effect of financial ruin. I argue that this mandate would actually increase the hiring rate in Montgomery County, as people are more likely to go to a job that ensures that they are doing at least the minimum to keep their employees safe. We cannot work from home in the service industry, but we shouldn't be made to feel like our lives are worth less than those who have the option.

Finally, while I feel the benefits of this mandate have been thoroughly explored, it is important for us to consider the downsides of not passing this mandate, of which there are several.

First and foremost, it's important to understand scientifically how virus mutations occur. Quite simply, mutations occur when the genetic composition of a healthy virus is allowed to change, and spread to another host. What this means for us, is that allowing unvaccinated individuals

universal access to spread their germs ultimately can and will lead to more Covid-19 variants. This is how Delta, Omicron, and many other variants have been created, as they were all allowed to breed within the bodies of unvaccinated individuals. If we really want to escape from the woes of this pandemic, we need to stop giving this virus the chance to mutate, and we cannot do that without restricting the unvaccinated from civilized society.

Second, a lack of mandate contributes to a major inequality within society. Vaccines are free, and their accessibility has been made easy, efficient, and safe. You can go to any pharmacy, grocery store, or any of the numerous pop-up locations that have been established, and be vaccinated quickly and easily. There are services that are even able to bring the vaccine to your doorstep, usually for free as well, for those that cannot leave their homes. In our county, this vaccine is accessible by all who choose to seek it. Yet, there are a small portion of our community who for medical reasons, are unable to get vaccinated. These people are at the highest risk of severe illness from Covid, and without protections like a vaccine mandate in place, they're essentially forced into a choice between home confinement, and potential life-threatening illness. Isn't it time that instead of trying to satiate the views of those who believe their "liberty," is more important than anything else, we actually did what a government is supposed to, and looked out for the most vulnerable in our society?

Third and finally, it is important to keep all of this in a relative perspective with some concrete numbers. According to Montgomery County health data, almost 95% of eligible MoCo citizens are vaccinated. What this tells us is that this would not create a realistic burden or loss of clientele for any establishment, as only 5% of people would thus be barred from these establishments. I ask you, as city council members, is it your duty to look out for 95% of citizens, or for 5%? Were you elected by only 5% of the population? Furthermore, are you truly able to look at yourself in the mirror, and say that you're okay with letting 5% of the population make this choice that will lead to literal issues of life and death?

We need to take a stand as a community and say quite simply, no more. No more will we allow an unvaccinated and misinformed minority to lead us to overflowing hospitals and watching our loved ones die behind sealed glass walls. No more will we allow business owners comfortable working from home to dictate what a safe environment is for those truly dealing with these issues on a day to day basis. No more will we stand against science and reason, and allow the guise of personal liberty to crumble the foundation of our society from within. We are better than that, and our actions must align with our principals.

So please. On behalf of myself, my household, and the service industry at large, please pass this vaccine mandate requirement for Montgomery County, before I'm the one lying in a hospital bed wondering when I, as a taxpaying and voting citizen, suddenly stopped mattering.