

January 13, 2022

Dear County Council,

Thank you for your service to our community. I am writing today to express my concerns about the resolution for vaccine mandates for some indoor businesses and community centers.

To give a little background about myself, I live in Montgomery County and work for Montgomery Parks as the Ice Skating Program Manager. We have worked throughout the pandemic in person since July 2020. Our workplace has had a mask mandate nearly the entire pandemic and we have a vaccine requirement for all staff and volunteers in place. I personally got a vaccine the minute I could find an appointment in April 2021 and a booster the minute I was due for it.

I am passionate about skating and adore sharing my love for skating with others (young and old). I have felt strongly that staying open (even with all the restrictions) gave many, many people an outlet throughout the last two years. It has kept children engaged with others at a time that they have needed it most, it's given adults an outlet for a physical and mental break from life, and it's kept people exercising. I personally have gotten hundreds of thank you's from skaters and parents for keeping the rinks running safely.

Unfortunately, not everyone has been willing to follow the county guidelines. Working in person in a community center setting has been extremely difficult for the last 22 months and has taken a toll on our staff both physically and mentally. It is unbelievably hard to get people to comply to county restrictions especially when they do not agree with them. In addition to all the thank you's I have also been yelled at thousands of times for asking someone to put a mask on; for telling a parent that we have a capacity limit, and they cannot come in to watch a hockey game; for not letting an adult hockey player use a locker room. Being in the DMV, we have many customers who come to our facility from outside of Montgomery County and they are not invested in following our county guidelines since they don't live here. I have left work many, many days feeling hopeless and defeated.

But this email is not just for you to feel sorry for me...this mandate will affect everyone who works in these service/retail fields. Our businesses have been restricted the most in all these county restrictions and we will not survive having to enforce these mandates. Our staffing levels are already stretched so thin that losing more staff will cause things to break. Since our county has such a high vaccine compliance, I cannot understand the purpose of this new mandate. It is not going to convince more people to get vaccinated; people have already made their minds up about that. These mandates are just causing more discord among the public. The first thought I had when I read about this mandate was "I am going to quit my job and move back to the Midwest." I am sure I am not the first or last person to have that reaction to this.

Our county has so many challenges facing it right now and it seems ridiculous to be putting things in place like this that have more negative connotations than positive. We don't have enough bus drivers to get kids to school. It's nearly impossible to schedule a covid test or get hands on an at-home rapid test. We have serious food insecurities in areas of our county. We are on the verge of a mental health crisis with our residents. At some point, I hope our county government can really shift their focus to the real needs of our community. A vaccine mandate for some indoor spaces in a county that has an over 80% vaccination rate is absurd when there are much bigger problems to fix.

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