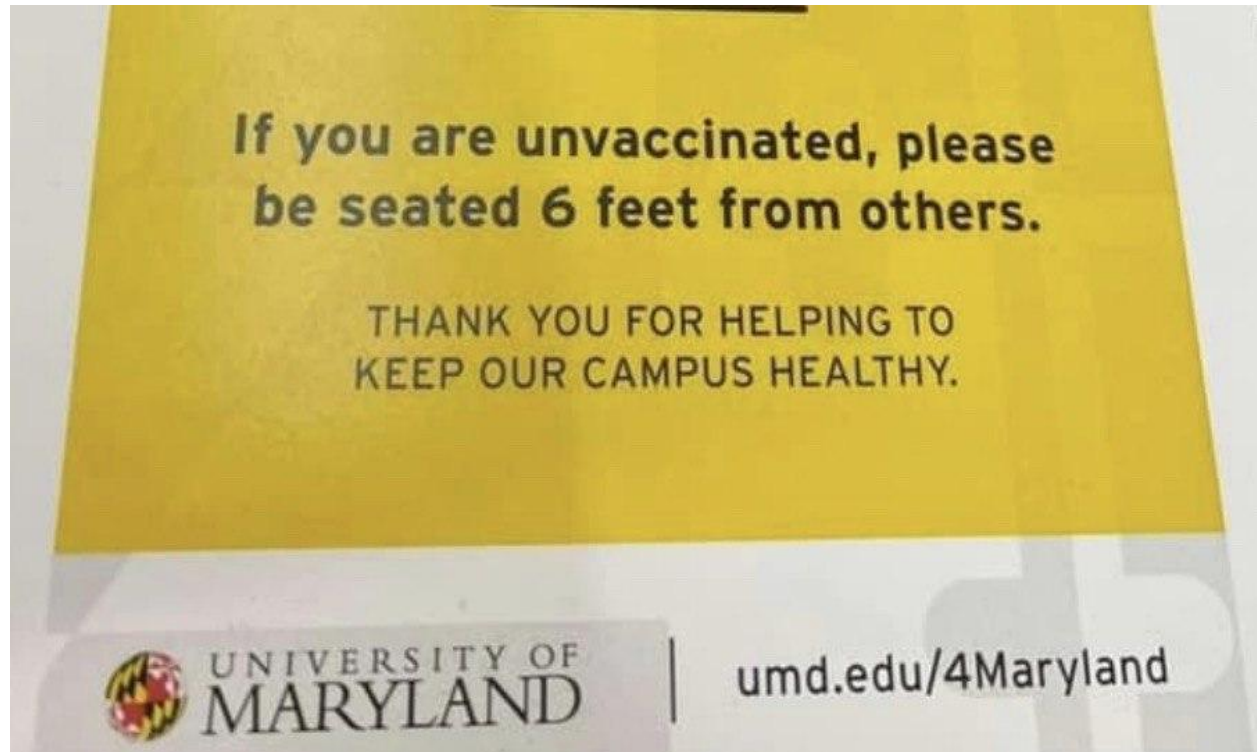


HB0699

Favorable with Amendments

Melissa Burns

Forest Hill, Maryland



Hello and thank you for taking on the enormous responsibility of making decisions that affect the lives of Marylanders. I am a licensed counselor in the state of Maryland, as well as the mother of two USM students. As a counselor I have a unique view into people's lives, and for the past three years I have seen the negative mental health impacts of the Covid-19 mandates.

I listened to sexual assault survivors as their traumas were retriggered by, once again, being forced to have something unwanted done to their bodies, in order to keep their jobs or remain enrolled in college.

I sat with people feeling completely helpless and falling into depression as all they had worked for their entire lives was being taken away because they would not inject themselves with a novel drug that had no long-term studies.

I heard the stories from those who knew first-hand of the true dangers associated with this shot, either by being injured themselves or by loved ones who had been injured, and how they were dismissed by doctors, shunned by family and friends, unable to work, left with enormous medical bills, and as a result sunk into depression. Some committed suicide.

I witnessed the increase of anxiety and depression due to the discrimination of those students on college campuses who had been granted exemptions. A clear representation of that discrimination is the flier (above) posted all over the College Park campus in early 2022 directing only “the unvaccinated to stand six feet apart”. This directive occurred despite the fact that by that time it had been well established the injections did not prevent infection nor transmission of the illness, and despite the fact that the unvaccinated were the only ones required to be tested regularly, and knew they weren’t sick. Neither the use of logic nor science were present in these policies.

I heard the stories by students who were ostracized and shamed by their peers for not taking the shot, because their medical or religious decisions became public as they were forced to stand in a line twice a week to get tested; despite being free of symptoms, and once again despite the fact that ANYONE on campus could spread the disease regardless of vaccination status. The social pressure was enormous. Coercion through shaming, gaslighting, ostracizing...all the tactics of domestic abusers.

I heard the frustration of those who were mistreated for months for being unvaccinated only to get covid from vaccinated peers, who of course were exempt from the twice-a-week testing because they were “vaccinated”.

I heard the stories of those who had legitimate medical and religious exemptions, being denied internships and on-campus jobs, even though scientifically they were no more a threat of spreading the virus than the vaccinated. On campuses that focus on equity, it was determined that there are actually conditions upon which inequity is apparently acceptable. And what about those who did not qualify for medical or religious exemptions and had to forgo everything they worked for because they made a decision over their own bodies? Is that equity?

The mental health impact of these decisions is enormous. And these are impacts that are long-lasting, unlike the 2-5 days of illness college-age students get with Covid-19. My phone did not stop ringing with desperate calls from parents trying to find help for their once happy child who was now sinking into anxiety and depression.

I implore you to make decisions for our state that protect ALL aspects of the lives of Marylanders. People’s lives were turned upside down for an illness with a death rate equivalent to that of the seasonal flu. People must have a choice when it comes to their own bodies.