

## SB0709

### (UNF) (OPPOSE)

As a Maryland resident and practicing physician who supports human rights and free speech, I strongly **urge opposition to SB0709**, in order to protect the rights of individuals to peacefully assemble and express their views, particularly in contexts where they may need protection from respiratory illness, “doxxing”, harassment, or violence.

#### **My concerns about this bill are multiple:**

- Prohibiting masks at protests might result in a chilling effect on free speech. Individuals may feel discouraged from participating in political demonstrations if they believe their identities will be exposed by state or private actors seeking to squash that political opinion. **As a result, the ACLU has opposed such mask bans.**
- Masks protect individuals who fear retaliation or harassment due to their beliefs or activism. **In recent months, many peaceful activists and protestors, including many in support of Palestinian rights, have faced severe repercussions for their participation in demonstrations, including “doxxing”—where personal information is shared publicly to incite harassment and threaten job security.**
- Although the bill permits masks for health or religious reasons, it’s unclear how protesters who are wearing masks for these reasons will be able to prove that to police officers at a protest.
- The bill’s sponsors have been open about their intent to target speech critical of the State of Israel, by describing this bill as a response to protests against Israel’s genocide of Palestinians in Gaza. **As such, the bill is effectively not content neutral and clearly has the goal of chilling specific political speech.**

I respectfully urge you **preserve freedom of expression** and protect of the rights of individuals to peacefully assemble and express their views. **In the strongest possible terms, I urge opposition to Senate Bill 0709.**

Thank you for your consideration,

Sincerely,

William F. Simonds, MD  
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