

February 24, 2025

The Honorable Chair Senator William C. Smith, Jr.
Chairman, Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: OPPOSITION of Senate Bill 0709
(Criminal Law - Masked Intimidation - Prohibition (Unmask Hate Act)) - UNFAVORABLE

Dear Chair Smith and Judicial Proceedings Committee Members,

My name is Rayshauna Lemon, I am a MD resident and I am writing to urge you to vote unfavorably on House Bill 1081/Senate Bill 0709. Carve-outs for medical mask use are not enough to protect disabled people from the dangerous consequences of this bill. Anti-mask laws will only increase mask stigma, increasing harassment and discrimination against mask-wearers.

Criminalizing masking is bad policy for public health. This is especially true right now, as the Maryland Department of Health recommends masking due to high hospitalization rates for COVID, influenza, and RSV.

Health exemptions for mask bans are impractical and unfair to enforce. The logistical challenges of verifying exemptions would result in inconsistent application and abuse, creating a civil rights and public health crisis.

This bill and its stated intent to decrease harm towards marginalized communities in real world application will target disabled community members of marginalized communities and young black boys. The penalties of this bill, fines and potential incarceration, can cause immense harm to members of these communities. This bill infringes on personal autonomy of these marginalized communities and the public at large.

In a new era, where we are fighting for our democracy. This bill also carries the consequence of fining and incarcerating individuals for using their first amendment right to free

speech.

For these reasons and more I ask that the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee give SB0706 an unfavorable report.