

## Unfavorable Testimony for SB0709

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing as a lifelong resident of Maryland and current resident of Marriottsville (western Howard County) to express my vehement opposition to SB0709 or the “Unmask Hate Act.”

I am a Black woman in this state who wears a mask in my daily life. I wear a mask to protect against airborne illnesses. Many mask-wearers already experience hostility from those who don't mask including but not limited to unsolicited, negative comments and being purposefully coughed on. Passing this act would further stigmatize mask-wearing.

Additionally, there exists in the ranks of police officers nation-wide an *act now, ask questions later* attitude. If a police officer arrests an individual who wears a mask to protect their health, that individual would be forced to remove their mask and be exposed to airborne illnesses such as COVID-19, RSV, Influenza, and more. Regarding COVID-19, [10% to 30% of even “mild” infections lead to Long COVID, which can include but is not limited to developing Type 2 diabetes, neurocognitive impairment, encephalitis, and lymphocytopenia.](#) In a situation like this, there would be no redress for that individual being forced to unmask. Many chronic illnesses like the ones listed are irreversible and incurable.

According to the American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland, “Black residents make up 63 percent of those killed by police in Maryland, even though only 31 percent of Marylanders are Black.”<sup>1</sup> The Maryland ACLU also reported that [out of 22,884 use of force incidents from 2015-2019, 91% were committed against Black residents.](#)

**This act puts Black and otherwise marginalized Marylanders at heightened risk for police violence by establishing pretext for increased encounters with police officers.**

I am opposed to the “Unmask Hate Act” in its entirety. It aims to criminalize and further stigmatize mask-wearing at a time when a) airborne illnesses are rampant and b) the newly confirmed Secretary of Health and Human Services has made clear his desire to limit access to and information regarding vaccines and other health protections.

SB0709 is ill-conceived, and the solution is not to revise it, but rather to not pass it in this form or any other.

Sincerely,  
Kamiye R.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.aclu-md.org/sites/default/files/field\\_documents/aclu-md\\_chasingjusticereport\\_aug2021.pdf](https://www.aclu-md.org/sites/default/files/field_documents/aclu-md_chasingjusticereport_aug2021.pdf)