

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 07091

(Criminal Law - Masked Intimidation - Prohibition (Unmask Hate Act)) -

UNFAVORABLE

Dear Chair Smith and Judicial Proceedings Committee Members,

My name is Victoria Walton and I am a MD citizen. I 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.

I am a disabled person who wears masks for my health. This broad sweeping generalization for masking will increase harm for vulnerable populations. 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.

It will also escalate biased law enforcement, which already disproportionately harms Marylanders who are Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Color. We are already policed and profiled at higher levels. And this legislation will create a chilling effect on anyone who simply wants to protect themselves from airborne illness as they go about their lives. Please support your constituents and do not pass this legislation.

Victoria Walton