

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 Jennifer Alice Thompson, 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 and creates a barrier to individual's ability to protect themselves from infectious diseases. 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.

Now more than ever it is important to be able to protect collective population health at a time we will undoubtedly see an increase in infectious diseases due to climate change.

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.

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