

Testimony in Opposition to HB1081 / SB709

Presented to the Maryland General Assembly

By Adah Nordan, Sophomore at American University

Monday, February 4, 2024

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Adah Nordan, and I am a student at American University. I am here to strongly oppose HB1081 / SB709, a bill that unjustly restricts the right to wear masks in public spaces. I have personal health-related reasons for wearing a mask, and I am an ally to disabled people, many of whom rely on masks to navigate public life safely. I also have friends and family in Maryland who would be directly harmed by this legislation.

This bill presents significant dangers to public health and civil liberties. It creates an enforcement mechanism that is both invasive and unworkable, requiring law enforcement to determine an individual's "intent" when wearing a mask. This standard is impossible to fairly enforce and opens the door to discrimination and harassment, particularly against disabled people, immunocompromised individuals, and people of color.

For many, wearing a mask is not a choice—it is a medical necessity. Immunocompromised individuals and those with chronic illnesses need masks to safely access essential services, attend school, and participate in daily life. By casting suspicion on mask-wearing, this bill discourages those who need protection from participating in public life at all, forcing them into further isolation.

Moreover, this bill's enforcement mechanism raises serious civil rights concerns. The subjective nature of determining "intent" allows for racial profiling and selective enforcement. It also puts law enforcement in the position of interrogating people about private health matters, an unnecessary and invasive practice that violates personal dignity and medical privacy.

If the goal is public safety, HB1081 / SB709 does the opposite. It criminalizes necessary health precautions, penalizes disabled and immunocompromised people, and erodes civil liberties without any measurable benefit. Maryland should be protecting its most vulnerable residents, not putting them at further risk.

I urge you to reject HB1081 / SB709 and protect the right to wear masks freely and without fear. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Adah Nordan

Student, American University