

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 Rachel Luce, I am a services manager at Baltimore Harm Reduction Coalition, 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.

I wear my mask daily to protect myself, my loved ones, and my Baltimore community from the preventable spread of infectious disease, and for many other reasons. I work with particularly vulnerable people, in both health and criminalization and my work is committed to keeping these people safe through the act of wearing a respirator. Criminalizing masking is an ineffective 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.

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

For any questions about my position, please feel free to contact me at rachel@baltimoreharmreduction.org

Thank you for your consideration,
Rachel