

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 Lila Someshwar and I am a Maryland resident. 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. This is especially true right now, as the Maryland Department of Health recommends masking due to high hospitalization rates for COVID, influenza, and RSV. This bill discourages Marylanders from wearing medical masks, regardless of carve-outs. That will only make public spaces less accessible to disabled people, and raise the levels of virus in the air.

This bill will also worsen the harassment and discrimination against mask-wearers that is already happening in Maryland. I have been harassed in public multiple times for wearing a medical facemask - I have been screamed at in the grocery store parking lot and while taking a walk in my own neighborhood. This bill will encourage and embolden people to harass me, and other people like me.

I have to wear a mask in public spaces, for medical reasons. This bill would put an undue burden on me in all public settings, because I'd be held to a different legal standard than any person not wearing a mask. That is unfair and discriminatory. 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.

The bill will also escalate biased law enforcement, which already disproportionately harms Marylanders who are Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Color (BIPOC).

Black, Indigenous, and Latino Marylanders are also more likely to be disabled, and more likely to suffer from conditions like Long COVID that weaken your immune system. This legislation will create a chilling effect on anyone who simply wants to protect themselves from airborne illness as they go about their lives.

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

**Sources: Jews for Mask Rights - Why Mask Bans Fail Jews and Other Marginalized Groups,** <https://www.jewsformaskrights.com/resources/the-dangers-of-the-unmaskhateny-mask-ban>, **Community Advocate, @cmmnctn.brkdwn,** <https://www.instagram.com/cmmnctn.brkdwn/>