

To whom it may concern,

I am writing both as a scientist who studies Coronaviruses and is about to graduate with a PhD from Johns Hopkins in Cellular and Molecular Medicine, and as a disabled person. I wear a mask because I know enough about airborne viruses, disease prevalence, and community spread to understand that everyone should wear one, and I know that I especially need to wear a mask for my own health.

If this bill passes, nobody is going to decide not to commit a crime because doing it in a mask is “extra” illegal. It will not deter crime at all. It will, however, deter people like me from going out in public for fear of someone calling the cops and erroneously claiming harassment. Only I know why I’m wearing a mask, whether it’s with the intent to be threatening or not, and a cop will make me take off my mask and risk my health with potentially irreversible consequences while they decide why I’m wearing it. Intent cannot be criminalized, and rights are stripped away in the attempt.

This bill relies entirely on the interpretation of “harassment” or “threatening” – and there are existing laws that better address those crimes. People falsely claim to be harassed or threatened by marginalized communities to weaponize the law all the time, and this unnecessary bill would be no different. It would be used to target minorities including disabled people and especially disabled people of color.

Furthermore, this bill would hand a convenient tool to suppress dissent directly to the Trump administration. Masks are a public health device that must be allowed in peaceful public protests, or people like me will be unable to exercise our rights. The current political climate is certainly not one in which protesting should be made more difficult.

Mask bans do not reduce crime, but they do make it easier to criminalize the innocent.

Thank you,

-Catherine LaCourse

