

Hello my name is Anne Smith from St Mary's County and I am asking the Judicial Proceedings Committee to give SB 0709 an unfavorable report.

I am testifying AGAINST SB0709.

My 30 year old daughter and her husband are currently living with my husband and I. They moved in with us after having to interrupt their plans to complete their graduate program degrees in Iceland. They had both had their first bout of COVID in December 2023. My daughter, who has had fibromyalgia for 10 years, and my son-in-law, who has had ulcerative colitis for almost the same amount of time, were completely incapacitated by the COVID and then long COVID. My daughter caught COVID from a medical practitioner in Iceland. Who, like her USA counterparts, did not wear a mask. My daughter was wearing a mask, but the duration and proximity of the appointment was too much for her one mask, and she left the appt with COVID.

Now that both are in our home, my husband and I wear masks to all public activities: the grocery store, church, work, the gym, etc. The ability to wear a mask without having to justify it is something I was taking for granted. Until now. This bill will set-up law enforcers and the general citizens to question anyone wearing a mask. The bill is questionably worded in such a way that I would not be sure that wearing a mask to Walmart would be legal. This just makes an already stressful situation even more so.

People committing a crime or public harassment should be held to laws addressing those things. Whether someone is wearing a mask or not is unimportant. In a similar line of thinking, will wearing a hoodie also be considered a crime, as they are sometimes used to "hide" behind as well. Or coloring someone's hair. Will that be a crime? Because criminals often do that to hide their identity. Or shaving facial hair. Or getting a haircut. Obviously these are all silly things that we would not question. In the same way, we shouldn't question a medical mask being worn by any individual. The wearing of a mask in public is already stigmatized enough and does not be stigmatized any further.

The Maryland Department of Health recently recommended bringing back universal masking in healthcare settings, too. Given the significant public health concerns, any attempt to dissuade people from masking is not in the best interest of anyone. Supporters of this bill fail to understand the broader implications for the health and constitutional rights of all Marylanders.

It is my hope that after reading this testimony, that you drop/oppose S.B. 0709.

Thank you.