

My name is Emily Richey-Stavrand. I live in St. Mary's County and masking keeps me alive.

I am testifying against S.B. 0709 and am asking the Senate to give S.B. 0709 an unfavorable report. I have Long Covid and Myalgic Encephalomyelitis after being disabled by a single Covid infection, which I got from my doctor. 14 months ago, before I got Covid, I was a long-distance runner, swimming or running every day, learning a new language, and in grad school for public policy. Now I live with my parents and can really only leave my house for doctors' appointments, which is why I have to submit a written testimony. It's too dangerous for me to come in-person without wide-spread masking, and the energy testifying in-person would take would likely cause me to be bedbound for weeks. If I get Covid again, I could become permanently bedbound or die.

Again, I am asking the Senate to stop S.B. 0709. This bill is a violation of my personal freedoms to protect my health and liberty and is an incredibly dangerous bill for all Marylanders. This bill further stigmatizes masking while we are in an airborne pandemic and at a time when there are so many other dangerous airborne diseases at record levels that experts are calling it a Quademic.

The supporters of this bill may cite the many carve outs- all which are effectively "approved" on a case-by-case basis by police- but similarly worded bills in NC and NY have led to an increased harassment and policing of people wearing masks even for medical reasons. *All the carve outs in the world wouldn't make this bill less dangerous for disabled people like myself.* I am incredibly concerned for my disabled Black, Latino, and Native friends, who all wear masks to protect themselves and their communities, and already face disproportionate harassment from police.

I find it critical to note that this bill is NOT based on science. You may remember that just a few weeks ago, the Maryland Department of Health recommended mask mandates in healthcare settings due to the incredibly high rates of Covid.

Listen to your constituents, care about intersectionality and disability justice, protect our health and personal freedoms, and vote against this bill please. Truly people's lives are depending on it. Mine is.