

I strongly oppose, in no uncertain terms, the proposal to restrict the ability for the general population to wear masks.

Masking allows ill and immunocompromised people to navigate through public spaces safely, especially during times of high illness spread (as in our current surge of virulent flu, RSV, and covid strains). Moreover, it allows those who are healthy to reduce their exposure and protect vulnerable friends and family, and allows those who are sick and forced to be in public (using a bus to travel to a doctors office, for instance) to be courteous and protect those around them.

Masking has been essential to keeping my family safe. My father has had 2 heart attacks, a quadruple bypass, and has 17 stents in his heart. My mother died of early onset Alzheimers disease in May 2023. Both of my parents were at extremely high risk from covid during the peak of the pandemic, and masking allowed me to continue to interact with them and support them safely. My parents did not contract covid until well after vaccines had been developed and deployed, and without the ability to mask, I firmly believe they would have been infected earlier, had significantly worse outcomes, and possibly died (or, in the case of my mother, died sooner).

Asking those who wish to mask to justify their choices unduly burdens those who, for either their benefit or their loved ones' benefit, are trying to reduce their risk of contracting disease. We do not ask those who use hand sanitizer to share their vaccines records. We do not demand a list of diagnoses from those who wash their hands. And we don't demand HIPPA protected information from people whose professions require wearing gloves for safety and sanitation (garbage collectors, doctors, nurses, etc). To do so would be absurd and fly in the face of established federal law and free speech protections. This begs the question then: why is a scrap of fabric across the face any different?

Particularly given the current tumultuous state of federal employment, which Maryland relies upon as a backbone of its economic stability, I cannot fathom why the state legislature has chosen to take up this issue instead of focusing on concrete actions that will benefit their constituents. We are scared for our jobs and our futures on a national level, we do not need to defend our right to free speech within the boundaries of our own state. And especially given the rapid spread of bird flu and the ongoing risk should it make the jump to human to human transmission, this bill goes beyond ignorance to fool hardy cruelty.

Please vote against this bill. Thank you!