

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 07091

(Criminal Law - Masked Intimidation - Prohibition (Unmask Hate Act)) - **UNFAVORABLE**

Dear Chair Smith and Judicial Proceedings Committee Members,

My name is Jessie Haviland, I am a MD resident, and 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. As a chronically ill and disabled person, I fear the repercussions of a mask ban in our great state of Maryland for both me and those with weakened immune systems like me.

As a master's-level social work student focusing on policy and advocacy, I know 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.

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