

To the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

My name is Andrew Brewster-Geisz, and I live in Greenbelt, MD. I'm writing as a concerned resident of the state of Maryland about the recently proposed "Criminal Law - Masked Intimidation - Prohibition (Unmask Hate Act)" - SB0709 sponsored by Senator Waldstreicher. I am someone who, since 2020, has worn a mask in all public spaces, both indoors and outdoors, to protect myself and others from COVID-19. As such, I find this legislation very concerning and urge it to be immediately retracted.

First, Maryland has very high levels of COVID-19. In January, Maryland's Department of Health recommended universal masking in all healthcare settings because of surging rates of respiratory illnesses in the state. The CDC, FDA, WHO, and OSHA all say that KN95 and N95 masks are the best evidence-based tools to prevent people from acquiring COVID-19 or the flu. This bill criminalizes mask wearing and conflates it with criminality, which is dangerous because it will only further add to an already existing public health crisis.

This leads me to my final point, which is that this bill will do little to prevent "masked intimidation" by protestors. It will instead lead to further discrimination against people of color as well as people who are immunocompromised and/or disabled. This bill leaves it up to the police to define what constitutes "masked intimidation", leaving the door open to racial profiling. Under this law, someone could be arrested simply because they were wearing a mask at a protest. And forcing immunocompromised and disabled people to remove masks is a grave risk to their health.

In conclusion, this bill is a danger to public health, will lead to greater racial profiling, and will not actually make anyone safer. I strongly urge you to vote against Senate Bill 0709.

Sincerely,

Andrew Brewster-Geisz