

02/24/2025

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 Mary Ella Jourdak, and I am writing this testimony to urge you to vote unfavorably on HB 1081/SB 0709. Carve outs for medical mask use are not enough to protect disabled people from the dangerous consequences of this bill, or the general public from the implications of policing others based on masks. Anti-mask laws will increase stigma, harassment, and discrimination against mask-wearers like myself.

I am writing this while battling a second round of flu and respiratory illness in the last month. As a photographer who often works with newborns or medically fragile families, I frequently wear a mask in public so as to protect my clients, and do not seek to incur additional harassment for this practice. Aside from the practicality of protecting Marylanders from short term illnesses, I find this bill to be deeply problematic in regards to the rights and safety of all in our state.

Health exemptions for mask bans are both 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 catastrophe.

A law in regards to masking will also escalate both biased law enforcement as well as harassment of those wearing masks. I have personally seen people using their support of this bill as a harbinger of false safety, saying that those who wear masks and keffiyehs (a scarf that is a symbol of Palestinian solidarity) are the same as those wearing KKK white hoods to promote hate. This is simply ridiculous and unwarranted, and would help those who seek to discriminate against others another tool to do so.

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

Thank you,
Mary Ella Jourdak