

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 Shannon Warren, I am a Maryland resident, and I am writing to urge you to vote unfavorably on House Bill 1081/Senate Bill 0709. Like many others, I think this bill will bring more problems than solutions. While the bill has listed what it deems to be acceptable instances of masking, how will this actually be implemented? Will people start to anticipate “harassment” because they see someone masking? How will this bill affect people’s day-to-day lives?

It is impractical and unfair to enforce a bill that relies on a subjective perception. The bill claims medical cases of mask wearing are okay, but there are many cases of disabilities not being visible, or able bodied people masking for a vulnerable loved one. Are people expected to carry every bit of medical evidence to show that they need to wear a mask? If police are enforcing these laws, are they now going to be medically trained to understand said medical evidence? Speaking of police enforcing this bill; it’s hard to deny preexisting biases won’t play a role. Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), and LGBTQ+ individuals are already disproportionately affected by law enforcement, and this bill would add to that.

Other states that have passed similar laws have already accumulated evidence of how anti-mask laws increase the stigma against masks, and increase harassment and discrimination against people who wear masks. There have been cases of people who wear masks that have been verbally attacked, but also physically assaulted.

When it comes down to it; I want people to be able to choose to mask without worry of being criminalized or othered for it. I want the messaging around masking to be one that describes how it can prevent illness, and how it can be an act of empathy. Most people I know wear a mask to protect themselves and others. Now more than ever seems like the perfect time to

encourage mask wearing. Businesses, schools, hospitals, etc. are being overwhelmed by illnesses like COVID, RSV, flu, tuberculosis, and it would benefit all of us to prevent the spread of illness as much as possible.

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

Thank you.

Shannon Warren

<https://www.jewsformaskrights.com/resources/why-ny-mask-ban-masked-harassment-fails>

<https://www.newsweek.com/former-actor-attacked-wearing-covid-mask-left-permanently-blind-1826193>