

# Seifer Almasy - Testimony Opposing HB 1081

My name is Seifer Almasy. I live in Maryland, and I am asking the members of the Maryland House Judiciary Committee to oppose HB 1081. Maryland must allow people with disabilities (such as those with compromised immune systems), and anyone concerned about their health, the ability to protect themselves with a face mask. Carve outs in the bill for health or religious reasons are inadequate, as any mask ban legislation will lead to human rights violations and disruptions to public health without any measurable benefit to law enforcement. Links to resources that support my written testimony appear below my signature.

HB 1081 will make the act of protecting oneself from airborne illnesses incredibly more difficult. It will inevitably add to the existing stigmas and harassment directed towards disabled people who mask for health reasons. This legislation will also escalate biased law enforcement or racial profiling, which already disproportionately harms Marylanders who are Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Color (BIPOC). And this legislation will create a chilling effect on anyone who simply wants to protect themselves from airborne illness as they go about their lives. Recently, a stranger yelled at me on the street to “take the mask off” and made me feel unsafe simply because I was wearing an N95 to keep from getting sick. Harassment and civil rights violations will happen more often if Maryland passes any legislation that broadly characterizes masking as criminal behavior.

Instead, our legislature should be working in tandem with Governor Moore’s administration to encourage masking right now. This is because the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) announced in a letter on a January 14, 2025, that the “statewide combined - COVID, influenza and RSV - weekly respiratory virus-associated hospitalization rate (as calculated by CDC) exceeds 10 hospitalizations per 100,000 residents, due in large part to increasing COVID and flu infections.” The increasing COVID infections are very concerning, as every COVID infection leaves long-lasting damage on the body, and roughly 1 in every 10 COVID infections results in chronic and debilitating health conditions (i.e. Long COVID). Moreover, studies indicate that COVID disproportionately harms BIPOC communities and women.

To protect the public, the MDH letter recommended implementation of “broad facility-wide source control in all patient care areas and patient-facing healthcare settings, including outpatient and long-term care.” Key measures include “universal masking in all patient care areas and patient-facing health care settings” in order to prevent and contain the spread of respiratory infections. These recommendations remain active as the current Maryland Weekly

Respiratory Virus-Associated Hospitalization Rate is over 20 hospitalizations per 100,000 residents as of this week, and has not dropped below 10 hospitalizations per 100,000 residents since the MDH announcement last month.

Then there is the issue of highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza (HPAI). Commonly known as bird flu, this virus has been identified in four farms on the Eastern shore as well as a backyard flock in Montgomery County. While there is no known evidence to support that HPAI can easily spread easily between humans, the US CDC encourages people working with animals to wear face masks like N95s to prevent infection.

With high rates of COVID, influenza, and RSV in Maryland right now, combined with the potential threat of HPAI, why does the legislature think it is a good idea to advance any legislation that could discourage masking?

Finally, banning masks will not help law enforcement. There is no evidence that banning masks reduces crime. Moreover, scientific studies indicate that facemasks are little better (if not worse) than sunglasses at hampering facial recognition.

In conclusion, we need lawmakers in Annapolis to consider legislation that protects everyone's rights to access public space safely. Banning masks is not the way to achieve this. Oppose HB 1081. Please see supporting links below my signature.

Thank you,

Seifer Almasy

List of Resources

Masking Up: A COVID-19 Face-off Between Anti-Mask Laws and Mandatory Mask Orders for Black Americans

<https://www.californialawreview.org/online/masking-up-a-covid-19-face-off-between-anti-mask-laws-and-mandatory-mask-orders-for-black-americans>

'Scared to put on my mask': Cancer patient says she was intentionally coughed on in spat over mask

<https://www.wral.com/story/scared-to-put-on-my-mask-cancer-patient-says-she-was-intentionally-coughed-on-in-spat-over-mask/21478890/>

Nearly 100 Organizations Demand New York Lawmakers Reject a State Mask Ban

<https://www.nyclu.org/press-release/nearly-100-organizations-demand-new-york-lawmakers-reject-a-state-mask-ban>

Mask Bans Insult Disabled People, Endanger Our Health, and Threaten Our Ability to Protest

<https://www.teenvogue.com/story/mask-bans-disabled-people-protest>

Philadelphia is latest city to restrict ski masks in public spaces; Critics say there is little research supporting the strategy

<https://newjerseymonitor.com/2024/01/12/philadelphia-is-latest-city-to-restrict-ski-masks-in-public-spaces/>

Maryland Department of Health Clinician Letter on Source Control 1.14.2025

[https://www.mbp.state.md.us/forms/Clinician\\_Letter\\_Source%20Control\\_1.14.2025.pdf](https://www.mbp.state.md.us/forms/Clinician_Letter_Source%20Control_1.14.2025.pdf)

Current Maryland Weekly Source Control Metric for Healthcare Settings

<https://health.maryland.gov/phpa/Pages/resp-virus-metric.aspx>

Beyond breathing: How COVID-19 affects your heart, brain, and other organs

<https://www.heart.org/en/news/2024/01/16/how-covid-19-affects-your-heart-brain-and-other-organs>

Cognition and Memory after Covid-19 in a Large Community Sample

<https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMoa2311330>

Development of a Definition of Postacute Sequelae of SARS-CoV-2 Infection

<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2805540>

Long COVID: major findings, mechanisms and recommendations

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41579-022-00846-2>

Long COVID: a clinical update

[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(24\)01136-X/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(24)01136-X/fulltext)

Sex Differences in Long COVID

<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2829454>

Variation in COVID-19 Mortality in the US by Race and Ethnicity and Educational Attainment

<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2786466>

Four Eastern Shore farms hit by bird flu; officials say outbreak is still manageable

<https://marylandmatters.org/2025/01/25/four-eastern-shore-farms-hit-by-bird-flu-officials-say-outbreak-is-still-manageable/>

Preliminary Testing Confirms Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in a Montgomery County Backyard Flock

<https://news.maryland.gov/mda/press-release/2025/01/30/preliminary-testing-confirms-highly-pathogenic-avian-influenza-in-a-montgomery-county-backyard-flock/>

The effect of face masks and sunglasses on identity and expression recognition with super-recognizers and typical observers

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8074904/>

Sunglasses and Face Masks Won't Fool Facial Recognition Systems Any More

<https://www.datasciencecentral.com/sunglasses-and-face-mask-wont-fool-facial-recognition/>

Face masks are less effective than sunglasses in masking face identity

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-023-31321-4>