

Good afternoon and thank you to the Council for allowing me to speak today.

I am here today to ask that the mask mandate be permanently removed from Montgomery County. I acknowledge the efforts the Council has made for the past 20 months to combat the spread of COVID within our communities, it is high time we accept that we will never (nor will anyone) achieve COVID Zero. Nor was that ever the intent of the harshest restrictions which began in March of 2020 which were to, famously, “flatten the curve” and allow hospitals and health care workers to not become overwhelmed. That goal has been achieved in Montgomery County for months now thanks to our high vaccination rates, proving their effectiveness. Cases do not matter when the evidence shows that severe disease is not the result, no matter how many cases are reported. To continue to tie mask mandates in any way to case counts is to signal lack of belief in the vaccines and the work done to make our county one of the highest percent vaccinated communities in the world.

Thanks to such a high vaccination rate, there were fewer than 600 total cases last week in a county of 1.1 million residents. That means that 1,099,400 people did not have a positive COVID test. Of those fewer than 600 cases, we do not know how many were asymptomatic or mild. Again, the mitigation efforts all along were supposed to be about reducing severe disease (it will never be fully eliminated). Only 73 people out of that 1.1 million population were in the hospital last week due to COVID. That is .007% of the population. In other words, 99.99% of the population should not be mandated to do something when COVID is a severe risk to such a tiny fraction of our population at this point.

The negative consequences of ongoing masking at this point far outweigh any potential benefits which in and of themselves are highly debateable. The County will continue to lose revenue to nearby counties in both MD and VA where, despite often higher case count trends, masks are not required. Studies abound about the negative development consequences in our children from extended mask wearing.

Finally, there is the ever important topic of what should government’s role be in our individual lives? Certainly those who feel more comfortable wearing masks can and should continue to feel that they can do so. But in an environment where the risk of severe disease is almost nothing at this point, those of us who choose to not wear masks should be free to exercise our human right to assess our own risk tolerance and make that decision ourselves. It is not the government’s place to do that for us.

Thank you for your time.