

Montgomery County Council
sitting as the Montgomery County Board of Public Health

Hearing on the Resolution to approve a First Amended Board of Health Regulation
to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and indoor mask guidance in Montgomery County

January 4, 2022

Testimony of Aaron Droller
Silver Spring, Maryland

Good morning Council President Albornoz and members of the Montgomery County Council. My name is Aaron Droller and I am a resident of Silver Spring, Maryland. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on the Resolution to approve a First Amended Board of Health Regulation to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and indoor mask guidance in Montgomery County (Regulation).

I am writing to respectfully request that you vote in favor of Councilmember Friedson's amendment (Friedson Amendment 1) that proposes to terminate the indoor mask mandate on January 25, 2022 at 11:59 p.m. As proposed by the County Executive, the Regulation provides no explicit mechanism or discernible off ramp for terminating the mask mandate in Montgomery County. The Regulation only requires that the Council meet every two weeks to "consider whether the indoor mask mandate must continue." This vague language provides no assurance to residents that the mask mandate will ever be removed. It makes residents entirely dependent on the whim of leadership to deem the mask mandate terminated at its pleasure, which is unfair to residents and businesses that have heeded the call of this Council to wear masks, as well as vaccinate ourselves and our children at extraordinary rates.

The County has consistently made promises to residents to remove mask mandates when certain metrics are attained, only to later break its word. The temporary rise of cases due to the omicron variant does not give this Council or the County Executive license to enshrine a mask mandate into law without an endpoint, particularly given the encouraging data from public health authorities and other countries regarding the severity of this variant, the effectiveness of vaccines to prevent hospitalization, and Montgomery County's extraordinarily high vaccination rate.

If circumstances require, the Council can always reauthorize any necessary public health measures. However, any reauthorization must be evidence based, narrowly tailored, and only in

effect for a limited period of time. The burden should not be on residents to prove or convince the Council and the County Executive that mask mandates are no longer required. Rather, the Council should have to actively reauthorize any further restrictions on a continual basis, if necessary.

Finally, I recommend the Council revise the phrase in the new paragraph 7 of the Background section found on page (2) from “for the foreseeable future” to “for a limited period of time”.

Montgomery County residents have done their part. Please support the Friedson amendment. Thank you for your consideration.