

I am writing to urge you to vote against the proposed vaccine passport. As many others have eloquently stated both in written and spoken testimony, there are many reasons to reject this proposal and I won't repeat all of those reasons here. However, I would emphasize that, putting aside important issues of civil liberties, from a purely public health perspective there can be only two arguable bases for such a passport: (1) to stop transmission, and (2) to keep hospitals from becoming overrun. Neither would be accomplished here.

It is now proven beyond any doubt that the Covid vaccines do not stop infection or transmission, and thus it is hardly surprising that following implementation of similar passports in other jurisdictions in the U.S. and abroad, case counts rose to their highest levels ever. The vaccines are self-protective because they mitigate the risk of severe disease, which should lower the chance of being hospitalized. But since Montgomery County already has one of the highest vaccination rates in the country, there is no reason to expect hospitals here to become overrun. In fact, based on the data provided on the County's dashboard, our hospitals have consistently been in the "low utilization" category, even during the recent surge. In short, the vaccine passport would serve no public health purpose whatsoever.

A vaccine passport also will impose undue burdens on businesses — many of which are already struggling with staffing — and will place them in the uncomfortable position of denying entry to either unvaccinated individuals or vaccinated individuals who simply have forgotten or lost their vaccine cards. Given that vaccination rates are lowest among people of color, this will likely result in highly publicized incidents of businesses excluding Black and Hispanic customers, perhaps with law enforcement involvement that will only further fan the flames of division that have caused so much distress across the country. We should not impose any law that results in segregation, nor should we put business and law enforcement personnel in situations that could irrevocably harm their reputations and livelihood — especially for something that serves no public health purpose.

Finally, the vaccine passport would be yet another restriction on children that is imposed under the guise of public health. Earl Stoddard made clear that the proposal was drafted specifically to drive higher vaccination rates among children, particularly in the 5-11 age group. This is unconscionable. As you well know, the vaccine has only been approved for emergency use in children. It has not been through the full FDA approval process, which is critical to ensuring the efficacy and safety of all drugs. While I am glad that the vaccine is available for children, whether to give a child a vaccine that does not stop transmission (unlike the measles vaccine, etc.) is a purely personal decision that should be made by the parents in consultation with their pediatrician. For children with co-morbidities, the vaccine may make sense now. For those without, it may not. But regardless, the choice is one for parents and their children's doctors to make, and should not be imposed by the Council through the threat of locking children out of activities and businesses.

Ultimately, many children will remain unvaccinated, and many won't understand why they are not being allowed to participate in things that are important to them (sports, gymnastics, karate, dance), or from going to their favorite restaurants, museums, and other venues. And like adults, children of color will be disproportionately affected. Children have already been through so much for 2 years, which represents a huge percentage of their lives. Each year is a lifetime to young kids, and something they will never get back. There are no "do-overs" for these lost years. As adults, we

like to tell ourselves that “kids are resilient.” But it is obvious now that is just an excuse to make ourselves feel better.

It is clear that kids are not okay. This hit home for me at the start of the Omicron surge when I was talking to my daughter about the latest cancellations and restrictions. She accepted all of this stoically, as she always does, but as she stared out the window, she said softly “You were lucky to grow up when you did.” With that one sentence, she conveyed so powerfully what this has been like for her and so many of her peers. We should not mistake our children’s compliance and stoicism for resiliency. Kids have been deeply affected already, and we have an obligation not to impose any more restrictions on them. It is time for life to become normal for them again, and a “show me your papers” requirement to do regular childhood activities is certainly not normal.

I understand the Council did not propose the passport. This was the work of Mr. Elrich, who rushed the proposal to the Council after Mayor Bowser issued her vaccine requirement by executive fiat. Apparently, that is all that is needed in D.C. But fortunately in Montgomery County we have the Council to act as a check on executive power. I urge you to do just that. Stop this proposal from becoming law.

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