



January 14, 2022

Dear Common Council Member,

We are writing today in our capacities as the President, Vice President and Executive Director of the Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association (MTEA). As representatives of our 5,000+ members charged with educating more than 70,000 Milwaukee children, we implore you to vote in favor of resolution 210628, the measure requiring facemasks be worn in publicly accessible buildings in Milwaukee.

COVID-19 infection numbers are completely out of control in the City of Milwaukee, last week surpassing *eleven times* the "Extreme Transmission" threshold of 150 cases per 100k residents. As the numbers began growing in August after a summer reprieve, MTEA asked the Milwaukee Health Department (MHD) to partner with us to keep our members, our students and our community safe. MHD refused. In September, when numbers surpassed that 150 threshold, we asked for a citywide indoor mask requirement to help keep numbers down. MHD refused. After ignoring the opportunity to get ahead of the curve, MHD is *finally* supportive of a mask requirement as case counts have gone parabolic.

To be clear, even today, the Health Commissioner could act more swiftly to protect our city by issuing a public health order, something she could accomplish in a matter of minutes rather than forcing the people of our city to wait any longer for the protection we deserve. However, while the Health Commissioner's delay is inexcusable, and while she has neglected her statutory responsibility to act to protect the people of our city, she has made it clear that the only way our city will have this critical mitigation layer is if the Common Council does so via ordinance.

MPS staff and students have done everything they can do to protect themselves, with staff vaccine requirements and masking requirements in place. But those protections only go so far when the city in which our students and our members reside is not also doing its part to protect them and their families. The lack of citywide mitigation efforts has harmed our students, MPS staff and their families, and it continues to do so every minute the city spends without a layered mitigation approach to COVID-19.

The city's lack of action has contributed significantly to the circumstances that have resulted in too many MPS workers being sick to be able to safely conduct in-person instruction. Public education workers want to be in person with our students. Virtual instruction is hard on educators, as it is hard on students and their families. The situation our city is in is also hard on our economy, as workers, who we know to be in high demand, must make arrangements to be home with their children when their classrooms or schools transition to virtual learning.

You are likely hearing from business interests on this matter as well, asking you to reject this measure and threatening economic hardship with warnings of businesses, customers and their dollars fleeing to the suburbs where masking is optional. That is ridiculous, and on the contrary, the safety of a masking requirement will attract conscientious shoppers in the short term, and a city with a reputation of keeping its people healthy may actually contribute to long-term economic growth. Layered mitigation efforts including required indoor masking will reduce the frequency of transitions to virtual learning, keeping students in classrooms and their parents and caretakers at work. We must prioritize public health and public education. What's good for public health, and what's good for public schools, is what's good for our economy.

The Common Council must pass resolution 210628 without delay. Please reach out to us should you wish to discuss this further.

Sincerely,



Amy Mizialko, MTEA President



Ingrid Walker-Henry, MTEA Vice President



Ben Ward, MTEA Executive Director