

Dear Mayor, Common Council, and City Leaders,

I am writing to you today to encourage you to NOT endorse, vote, or pass the mask ordinance that was proposed last Friday at the Public Safety and Health Committee meeting. This legislation was proposed less than 24 hours before the committee meeting, leaving literally no room for public comment, planning, or insight. There are many reasons that this ordinance is not appropriate, and will truly have no positive effect on our COVID response. This mandate/ordinance is also all encompassing which leaves no reason for exemptions like eating or drinking, actors, sports players, news anchors, vaccine requirements etc., which makes absolutely no sense. It essentially shuts down the local economy.

Applying a city-wide only mask ordinance will not change the overall landscape of the pandemic currently, or where we go from here. Cases are just starting to peak from the worst surge we have ever been through. This surge came after 69% of Milwaukee county has received at least one dose of Covid vaccine, and 62.5% are fully-vaccinated. Masks are currently mandated in schools, theaters, many workplaces, and countless other places where the public gathers. The virus spreads with or without vaccination, and unless you have the most sophisticated mask on the market, the CDC is now saying the others are basically pointless. The virus will continue to spread with or without masks, and we must focus on vaccinations to drive down the greater risks from contracting covid.

The hospitality industry has been to hell and back during this pandemic. We have unfairly been made the public enemy, deemed non-essential, and in all fairness been the scapegoat for many of these policies/laws/mandates. We have had to endure operating with safety plans, investing countless dollars into transforming our businesses to be "safe." We even had a third party company hired by the City to threaten us with massive fines for our customers actions and not our own actions.

After listening to many weekly public briefings it is my conclusion that the City of MKE Health Dept doesn't have the capacity or desire to enforce a mask mandate. There are many reasons why, but the most important one to me that has been voiced is the safety of their staff. I share the same sentiment. Being that I as a business owner and my staff had to be the city enforcement mechanism in the past was one of the most dangerous and in all honesty mentally draining jobs I've ever had to do. When approaching customers about putting on their masks, we were verbally harassed, threatened, and at times physically approached. This pandemic and its restrictions have put many at their breaking point. I can not put myself or my staff in harm's way again. This mere fact should be the reason this ordinance doesn't pass. The ordinance will once again further polarize the public, and put us as the enforcers in a dangerous position. I am a firm believer, however, that if a private business wishes to enforce their own rules on masking/vaccination, that is 100% OK and is their own prerogative.

Doing a mandate in the City of Milwaukee will put us on an island once again. I had the experience of operating locations outside of the city limits (Shorewood and Wauwatosa) during the last mandate and strict rules, and I can tell you first hand that patrons/families/residents would purposely make the simple 5-10 minute drive to surrounding communities to once again enjoy the sense of freedom they once had in the city. They would then return to the city limits, making those restrictions absolutely pointless. The only point they proved was hurting our local economy. Consumer behavior would also shift to the big box stores where food/drinks are sold, and many will begin gathering with friends indoors, which has been one of the leading drivers in spread.

We have been at this for two years now, and I couldn't stomach going backwards once again. We will lose so many great operators and contributors to our city and society. We all watch the news, read

articles, and have constantly had all the items (including masking) pounded into the daily narrative. People are going to do whatever they feel is safest for themselves at this point. We have come to a point where we must move forward. Focus on what matters and makes the most difference: Vaccines.

Omicron is now the dominant variant in the US, Wisconsin, and MKE. It is proven that this variant is by far less lethal. We are watching South Africa's Omicron outbreak drop faster than any other variant, and the UK (London) is showing the same pattern. We are only a week or two away according to many projections including the CDC. Going back to restrictions/mandates/ordinances that were once put in place when the virus first emerged when we were unprepared, is no longer appropriate. We now have a toolbox of resources such as: vaccines, therapeutics, advanced care, and natural immunity.

Simply stated, there is really no good that will come out of this ordinance/mandate. Until a nationwide mandate is put in place (which will never happen), this swiss cheese approach of one small city putting a mandate on its people is nothing more than an economic killer.

Respectfully,

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