

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

P.O. BOX 750 · MADISON, WI 53701 · (608) 256-8900 · WWW.FFRF.ORG

January 27, 2021

SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL

Wisconsin State Assembly
Wisconsin State Capitol
2 E Main St
Madison, WI 53703

Re: Let the Science Speak and Leave Statewide Mask Mandate in Place

Dear Representative:

We are writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation and our Wisconsin membership to respectfully urge you to “listen to the science,” as Dr. Anthony Fauci encourages,¹ and protect the current statewide mask mandate. FFRF is a national nonprofit headquartered in Madison, with more than 33,000 members, including more than 1,500 throughout Wisconsin, which works to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, and to educate about nontheism.

Public policy must be based on science, reason, data, compassion and expertise, especially during a deadly pandemic. On January 19, Governor Evers wisely extended Wisconsin’s statewide mask mandate through March 20. As his emergency order explains, there are new, highly contagious COVID-19 variants that pose a significant risk to Wisconsin’s healthcare system, healthcare workers, and their ability to treat people in need of care.² The order wisely notes that “to protect and save lives, we must use every tool available to slow the spread of COVID-19, including limiting in-person gatherings, diligently washing hands, practicing physical distancing, and wearing a face covering when around people from outside your household.”³

Governor Evers does and must have the authority, as well as the moral duty, to issue emergency orders to protect the health and wellness of Wisconsinites during a pandemic. The importance of this authority is underscored by the fact that the Wisconsin legislature failed to pass any COVID-19 related legislation in the past year, leaving Governor Evers with no choice but to take the best actions, based on science and data, to reduce the spread of the virus. As you are aware, rather than

¹ “Fauci on What Working for Trump Was Really Like,” New York Times, January 24, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/24/health/fauci-trump-covid.html>

² <https://evers.wi.gov/Documents/COVID19/Em001-JanFaceCoverings.pdf>

³ *Id.*

taking appropriate action, two days ago, on a date during which 54 more people died and 135 more were hospitalized in our state, the Wisconsin Senate irresponsibly voted to end the mask mandate.⁴

Masking is not only vital to protect the health of Wisconsin citizens and reduce the spread of COVID-19, but is essential to Wisconsin's economic security by ensuring that many Wisconsin businesses, retail stores, groceries and restaurants can safely stay open. Wisconsin's health and economy must not fall victim to partisanship. Masking to prevent the spread of a deadly contagious virus is of proven medical health benefit, and does not pose a civil liberties infringement, nor should it be a partisan political issue. Medical experts agree that wearing masks is one of the most effective means for breaking the transmission cycle of the highly contagious respiratory virus. Masks are even more important now that the virus is mutating and becoming more contagious. **Importantly, the majority of Wisconsinites support requiring masks in public⁵ and over 90 percent of Wisconsin citizens have been complying with state-issued mask mandates,** an increase from 41.5 percent when masks were encouraged but not mandatory, according to an observational study conducted by researchers in Marquette University's College of Health Science.⁶

The Wisconsin Medical Society, the largest organization representing individual physicians in Wisconsin, also recently weighed in, pointing out that besides the vaccine, mask wearing is one of the few tools we have in our arsenal to combat the virus and prevent it from spreading even further.⁷ A study published in *Health Affairs* compared the COVID-19 growth rate before and after mask mandates in 15 states and the District of Columbia. It found that mask mandates led to a slowdown in daily COVID-19 growth rate, which became more apparent over time. The first five days after a mandate, the daily growth rate slowed by 0.9 percentage-points compared to the five days prior to the mandate; at three weeks, the daily growth rate had slowed by 2 percentage-points.⁸ Another study found that countries with

⁴ "Wisconsin COVID-19: WI reports 1,301 new coronavirus cases, 54 deaths," ABC7News, January 26, 2021, <https://abc7chicago.com/wisconsin-covid-today-restrictions-coronavirus/10036098/>

⁵ <https://law.marquette.edu/poll/>

⁶ "Marquette Researches find that over 90% of Wisconsin Residents in Compliance with State Mask Mandate," Marquette University, October 15, 2020, <https://www.marquette.edu/news-center/2020/marquette-researchers-find-90-percent-of-wisconsin-residents-in-compliance-with-state-mask-mandate.php>

⁷ "Wisconsin doctors back mask mandate as Republican legislators eye repeal," Wisconsin State Journal, January 26, 2021, https://madison.com/wsj/news/local/govt-and-politics/wisconsin-doctors-back-mask-mandate-as-republican-legislators-eye-repeal/article_9e7a1535-5767-54b3-a3ab-529c34c5681d.html

⁸ "Community Use Of Face Masks And COVID-19: Evidence From A Natural Experiment Of State Mandates In The US," Health Affairs, June 16, 2020, <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hlthaff.2020.00818>

cultural norms or government policies favoring mask-wearing had lower death rates.⁹

Everyone must do their part to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and wearing a mask is one of the most effective tools we have to do so. Devastatingly, more than 5,700 Wisconsinites have died from Covid-19 and more than 500,000 have tested positive. **The masking requirement has worked in Wisconsin.** We have gone from being one of the nation's most consistent hotspots last fall to finally beginning to flatten the curve.¹⁰ We simply cannot accept any additional preventable deaths.

To protect the health and safety of all Wisconsin residents, we urge you to “let the science speak” and keep the mask mandate in place. We encourage the Wisconsin legislature, rather than working to repeal safety measures already in place, to focus on further measures to slow the spread of Covid-19. This would include reforming archaic regulations that have, to our state's shame and detriment, to date denied many eligible and hurting Wisconsin citizens and families unemployment benefits they have earned, as well as other basic aid to ensure survival during the pandemic.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter. We hope this letter finds you in good health.

Very truly,



Annie Laurie Gaylor & Dan Barker
Co-Presidents

ALG/DB:cal

⁹ “Association of country-wide coronavirus mortality with demographics, testing, lockdowns, and public wearing of masks (Update June 15,2020),” ResearchGate, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342198360_Association_of_country-wide_coronavirus_mortality_with_demographics_testing_lockdowns_and_public_wearing_of_masks_Update_June_15_2020

¹⁰ “COVID-19: Wisconsin Summary Data,” Wisconsin Department of Health Services, January 26, 2021, <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/data.htm#summary>