

Thousands of parents, teachers and students have sent **unanswered** letters to the Governor's office, the CT Department of Public Health, the State Department of Education (SDE) and the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) as well as spoken at local and state board of education meetings over the past year detailing the adverse impacts of masking children on a long-term basis. Parents have an **unalienable right** to decide what is best for their children. Therefore, Governor Lamont's emergency powers should **NOT** be extended, especially as they relate to universal masking in schools. These mandates have been in place for TWO LONG YEARS and the impact to our children, especially to those of young ages is IRREVERSIBLE. An extension should not even be on the table. Legislators need to vote NO so our children do not suffer a day more and we can change focus to how to remediate development and knowledge gaps and begin to heal.

The recent Omicron wave could potentially be viewed as an emergency if we compare it to case and infection levels earlier in the pandemic. But what did the emergency powers get us in Connecticut? There was the highest positivity rate since the beginning of the pandemic (it was not controlled by vaccines or masks), the highest number of cases we've ever had in schools (including mostly the vaccinated staff), a lack of testing capacity and promised home tests as well as a shortage of teachers and healthcare workers.

Two years into the pandemic, there still are NO peer-reviewed studies published concluding that mask wearing in schools is effective in reducing viral transmission. It is clear that any potential marginal protection against viruses is completely outweighed by adverse impacts of mask wearing. And recently the CDC issued a statement regarding the lack of efficacy of cloth masks, which the Lamont Administration and DPH and SDE conveniently ignore. They also ignore the near identical public health outcomes in states with no emergency declarations or unamerican mandates.

Meanwhile, as our children remain masked- there are more than 45 potential adverse impacts to them, including physical symptoms and health impairments, behavioral, psychological, social-emotional, developmental and academic impacts. Children have had to receive medical attention and even hospitalization as a result of having to wear a mask for so many hours per day. Many do not know this- administrators have denied exemptions and accommodations written by pediatric specialists though these administrators and staff do not have the expertise, credentials or authority to make health decisions for our children. **The current public health emergency is ACTUALLY related to children's mental health which has been created by the enforcement of Governor Lamont's executive order giving the SDE and OEC authority to implement socially isolating and confining COVID mitigation strategies.**

Let me remind you of **The World Health Organization's Mask Wearing Guidance (which has remained consistent during the entire pandemic)**: Children aged 5 (in Kindergarten) and below never wear masks, and children aged six to eleven only be masked in classrooms if their school is in a locality with widespread transmission and only after consulting with parents, teachers, and medical providers, to weigh the potential impact on learning and psychosocial development. Lastly, children of any age should never wear masks during sports or physical activities. Why has Connecticut ignored the WHO in regard to this pandemic?

With all due respect to Commissioners Juthani, Bye and Russell-Tucker, these Commissioner roles as well as Governor Lamont's are not to mandate health practices, testing and treatments. Their roles are to inform the CT population and make recommendations. SIMPLY RECOMMENDATIONS. There is no One size fits all when it comes to medical decisions EVER, which is why we have doctors we select to work with and provide care for us. Each person in our community has a different health profile and what is beneficial for one person may be consequential for another and vice versa.

The CDC, the US Department of Education, the Harvard School of Public Health, the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health and American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) all highly value and recommend ventilation as the most important COVID mitigant. In fact, ESSER funds and American Rescue Plan Funds preferentially directed funds toward ventilation improvements. Yet funds weren't used for ventilation. There has been no air quality emergency declared in schools where state law gives the Department of Public Health the option to make funding available. Instead, the administration has unconstitutionally mandated children wear ineffective masks in poorly ventilated classrooms. This is an astonishing fact which Democrats and Republicans alike recognize. It is shameful how our state agencies have looked the other way on ventilation and have instead stifled our children.

The constitution calls on three equal branches of government; this structure must be restored. The suffering of children and families can never be restored, but its duration can be ended now.