

Thank you for this opportunity to share my views. I appreciate Governor Lamont acknowledging how the pandemic has evolved, and that CT is in a much better place than we once were. Now that we are two years in, the data collected about cases and masking clearly support mask choice. Data collected in individual states and country wide shows that cases rose significantly with Omicron regardless of mask mandates or mask choice. NY is a stunning example. With Omicron, a thankfully less severe variant, people developed natural immunity which the CDC now acknowledges. Everyone 5 and over has the opportunity to be vaccinated. For those who can't be vaccinated, and are at risk from Covid, that risk is thankfully now equal to other viruses that they've always been at risk from.

Our three children have been impacted by remote learning, and all the mitigation strategies in school. They've been the lucky ones though...just general sadness on what their lives once were, vs. what they've become. They often talk about how they're the least impacted by the disease but have lost the most due to restrictions. Some of their peers are dealing with much more difficult challenges.

Our older children were the high school class of 2020. They were the class that went home one day in March, never to return to their school building. Among their peers, they've witnessed tragedy – suicide, attempted suicide, a tragic car accident, trips to the hospital from risky behaviors. I'm grateful that we've acknowledged the harms of remote learning and don't want to repeat that mistake. The harms of masking and mitigation strategies are starting to be revealed in the form of increased speech and mental health evaluations. I'm afraid that a year from now, we will look back at masking and mitigation strategies in a similar way that we now look at remote learning.

Our high school freshman misses what life once was for him, when he was 12. He will be 15 in a few weeks. With continued restrictions in place in schools, schools are the last place that kids want to be. Meanwhile, life outside school has returned to normal. Adults lives resemble pre-pandemic norms, while children's lives are stuck in an alternate universe in school where there are constant reminders of covid. Young children's ability to speak and read and learn are drastically impacted.

Before Covid, the AAP recommended limiting screen time, and stressed the importance of facial expressions for development and learning. When Covid appeared, those recommendations were thrown out the window. Why?

The news and the Governor are reporting that he's ending the mask mandate on 2/28. Yet, if I understand correctly, he wants to codify the option of future masking into law. So in actuality, is the mask mandate only being paused if legislature votes to pass his 11 orders? Masking, like remote learning, should be a mistake that never gets repeated.

The kids aren't as resilient as we'd thought. The risk of Covid for kids was never what it was for older adults. We need to stop sacrificing kids to protect adults (who now have many tools to protect themselves). Please return kids' lives to pre-2019 normalcy in every sense, including making masking a choice for all CT children, permanently, without an option to mandate in the future.

The attached charts (mostly sourced from the NYT) demonstrate case rates with and without mask mandates. Two states are wrapping up mask choice vs mask mandate studies they started at the beginning of the year, making them the longest studies to date. There is very little difference, or mask optional fared better.

Without substantive proof of masks helping, combined with concrete data that demonstrate masks harm, do not codify these 11 executive orders into law. The emergency is over, thankfully. Stop selectively supporting one.