

Dear Chairs Daugherty Abrams and Steinberg, Vice Chairs Anwar, Kushner, and Gilchrest
Ranking Members Hwang, Somers, and Petit, and members of the Public Health Committee,

My name is Timothy Gabriele. I am a resident of North Haven, CT and I am writing to provide testimony on the Continuation of Emergency Declarations and Limited Executive Declarations.

It is understandable that after two years of a pandemic that has ripped 900,000 American lives from us and transformed countless others (I write to you one day after the death of a family member from this horrible virus), many have grown restless for a return to some kind of normalcy. Even in the face of such unspeakable tragedy and trauma, the kind from which we will not easily rebound, I share this listlessness at times. Clearly this has been exacerbated by the semblance of a horizon that has ebbed ever further away as new variants, supply chain limitations, operational limitations, and poor decision-making on the federal, state, and local levels have toyed with our hopes, disrupted our lives in countless ways, and created a state of mass confusion.

The situation is complicated by the fact that many of the structural barriers to defeating COVID-19 or its many variants- a lack of free universal healthcare, public and affordable housing for all, robust testing, working conditions that favor the well-being of labor over the profit of management- have not been addressed. Despite this, we know life must continue for those of us lucky enough to still have one after the virus's aggressive campaign to wipe out as many of us as it can.

This is why I am asking for our esteemed Connecticut legislators to continue exercising the caution and care that allowed Connecticut to have some of the most successful public health outcomes in the country, such as robust masking in schools, public health facilities, and other indoor spaces as needed for the time being. The effectiveness thus far of masking in preventing [spread](#), as well as school [closures](#), is well-established. One need only compare schools [without mask mandates and compare them](#) to CT rates to showcase how important this one preventative measure has been.

There will hopefully be a time in the not-too-distant future when we may be able to comfortably remove masks. But it is crucial that as members of the public health committee, you establish criteria for when and how this decision can be made. Leaving it up to individual districts to establish their own guidelines is abandoning the health and safety of students, school staff and personnel, and the communities they service to the whims of a highly motivated, overly optimistic set of parents, who've been guided and organized in part by a [bad faith political crusade](#). It is important that we don't let the aforementioned restlessness blind us to the high morbidity and high infectiousness of this awful virus. Other states that have gambled and bet against COVID have paid severely in lost lives, countless Long COVID diagnoses, damaged lungs, and endless heartbreak.

We have a number of top tier medical research facilities in the state, as well as publicly available peer-reviewed research, that should be able to provide ample evidence of the relative conditions needed to begin unmasking. We should be looking at this robust data (vaccination rates among various age groups, positivity rates, et. al) to find the thresholds needed in order to safely and

judiciously resume an unmasked learning environment. Thresholds for unmasking should always be coupled with thresholds for remasking as well. We need to monitor these things closely and we need these processes standardized. COVID knows no borders, so one town's lousy decisions could have grave affects on all of us. As community leaders, it is your responsibility to express to your constituents why the mandates and conditions are in place and why they are necessary, even when it may be politically unpopular.

In addition to setting these parameters in conjunction with public health officials, these guidelines should also be in compliance with the needs and concerns of teacher's unions and other school bargaining units, to make sure they feel they are being protected and are operating under the best learning conditions available. It is also vital that immunocompromised and disabled persons who are the most vulnerable not be left out of this conversation. They stand the most to lose and are not always factored into discussions of "normalcy" since their baseline for normalcy can vary wildly from other folks.

I hope the committee and Connecticut lawmakers agree that we need to exercise extreme caution and establish rigid, easily applicable guidelines and standards for all school districts to abide by before allowing the masks that have save countless lives to come off in schools or other settings. I thank the committee for their time.

Sincerely,
Timothy Gabriele
North Haven, CT