

July 22, 2021

Sen. Jimmy Hickey, President Pro Tempore
Rep. Matthew Shepherd, Speaker of the House
Gov. Asa Hutchinson
Members of the Senate
Members of the House

While we represent parts of Pulaski County, we accept our responsibility to act in the interest of our entire state. After all, we are *state*, not *district*, *legislators*. Please, accept this letter specifically on behalf of our constituents but also on behalf of the common good of all Arkansans.

On July 27, 2021, Act 1002 will take effect. As you are aware, this act prohibits a state agency or entity; a political subdivision or the state; or state or local officials from mandating the use of face masks, face shields or other face coverings as a condition for entry, education or services. Not one of us voted for this legislation. In fact, it would be fair to say we vehemently opposed it, but we are clear it was passed following processes formulated and agreed to by both the House and the Senate.

The problem we face now is Act 1002 was passed in what seems another epoch. Health-wise, that was certainly the case. Having followed medically informed protocols, there was reason to believe that when it came to COVID-19, our state was going in the right direction. There was reason to assume it was safe to return to a sense of normality, so we did so—even passing legislation surely informed by that optimism. As with most things in this pandemic, however, nothing is certain, and since the legislature recessed in April, circumstances in our state have altered dramatically.

Our frontline workers are re-living long, difficult hours of doing whatever it takes to care for COVID-stricken patients as hospitals are at or very nearly at capacity. We get the numbers every day. We know what's happening, so there is no need to pile on about our present statewide condition. Importantly, in response to the COVID-19 whiplash, the CDC has issued updated guidance to reflect recommendations in response to current circumstances, and that guidance clearly recommends the use of face masks for unvaccinated students (age two and older) in educational and other environments in order to help stop the spread. This same guidance applies to unvaccinated adults.

Just as we do, we are sure you must be hearing appeals from the people of our state to provide relief only we as elected officials can deliver. For children going back to school; for parents fearful for their children; for educators and support staff concerned about safety for the overall school experience; for our frontline/essential workers; and for the physical and mental health of all Arkansans, we ask you to join us in support of an immediate call for a special session of the General Assembly or reconvening of the the House and Senate to lift the ban on mask mandates in a manner that respects the will of the legislature, the health of our people, and the importance of locally informed responses.

We look forward to working with you. We pray for and eagerly await a positive response.

Sen. Joyce Elliott*

Sen. Linda Chesterfield

Sen. Clarke Tucker

Rep. Andrew Collins

Rep. Joy Springer

Rep. Fred Allen

Rep. Tippi McCullough*

Rep. Fred Love

Rep. Jamie Scott

Rep. Denise Ennett

Rep. Ashley Hudson

Rep. Mark Perry

*All legislators listed here have given us explicit permission to add their names as supporters of the content of this letter.