

February 21, 2022

Chairperson Brenda Landwehr

House Committee of Health and Human Services

Kansas State Capitol

10th and Jackson, Room 112N

Topeka, Kansas 66612

In Person Testimony RE: HB2498

Chairwoman Landwehr and distinguished committee members, to state my background I recently retired after practicing medicine for over 40 years. I have asked to present testimony from the viewpoint of a physician and a parent. I believe masking mandates for children are a horrible and unnecessary burden on our children which **are producing** terrible consequences immediately, and more to be determined in the future.

To begin with, virtually all Covid cases now are due to the omicron variant. As we all know, omicron is extremely contagious, replicates 70 times faster in the body than does Delta variant, but Omicron replicates 10 times slower in the lungs than does Delta. Hence omicron produces much less pulmonary disease than does Delta and previous variants. The bottom line is that overall, omicron produces very mild disease which in children, and in fact is usually completely asymptomatic. As such, it should be considered in the same category as the common cold, which is the category which many countries have now relegated omicron infection to. Recently, many countries have completely eliminated all masking mandates, business closures, social distancing requirements, school, business, social event, and sporting event lockdowns. The reason for this is because there was no proven benefit in retrospective studies of these measures. For instance, a New England Journal of medicine article dated February 18, 2021 entitled “open schools, Covid – 19, and child and teacher morbidity in Sweden” reported on Sweden’s experience with Covid 19. Sweden decided to keep all schools open, including preschool so all children aged 1 to 16 were attending their usual schools. Social distancing was encouraged in Sweden but wearing of facemasks was not. This was in the time before we knew of the three stages of Covid – 19 disease and treatment was not as effective as it is now. The letter states that no child with Covid 19 died. Very few children were hospitalized or placed in the ICU. In addition, in this large study the rates of intensive care admission for preschool and school teachers in Sweden was very low, either the same risk or lower risk than other professions in Sweden. This is summed up as saying “despite Sweden’s having Schools and preschools open, and without masking, we found a low incidence of severe Covid 19 among schoolchildren and children of preschool age during these SAR S – COV – 2 pandemic.”

Portugal has never required masking for children under 11 years old and has come to grips with the fact that while virtually all of Portugal's population has been multiply vaccinated, and masking was required, Portugal still had a high Covid death rate and excessive Covid spread. This demonstrated that the virus will circulate regardless of masking and vaccination measures.

In September 2021 Norway reclassified Covid 19 as no more dangerous than ordinary flu in part because omicron is a low – risk infection for the vast majority of the population. Sweden found that “more children aged 10 – 19, for example, died of the common flu each year, between five and 10 children, which is more than what died with Covid – 19 in 2020 and 2021, as according to the national board of health and welfare’s death register only for children who died with Covid – 19 so far. In terms of this age group, the flu is more dangerous than Covid – 19.” This is a quote from Niklas Arnberg, professor of virology at Umea University and the chairman of the pandemic foundation in Sweden.

Because the health risk from omicron Covid – 19 disease is very small to both students and teachers, because it has been shown that students rarely transmit Covid – 19 to teachers, and because students rarely transmit Covid – 19 among themselves, I submit that there is no scientific evidence to support masking of schoolchildren and strongly recommend all masking requirements be discontinued. It is clear that Masking requirements are producing detrimental effects to the social, psychological, and even educational development of our children , especially when their brains are in the rapid development phase. Please do not require Masking of our schoolchildren.

Respectfully Submitted,

Festus Krebs III MD MBA

Johnson County, Kansas