

November 7, 2021

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To The Editor:

The recent news that Vermont experienced 487 COVID cases on Thursday, November 4, breaking the all time record by more than 100 cases, was extremely disheartening even to the most optimistic Vermonters. Friday followed on its heels with 377 new cases and a 3.3 percent positivity rate. With more than 90 percent of eligible Vermonters vaccinated, one has to wonder what is going on.

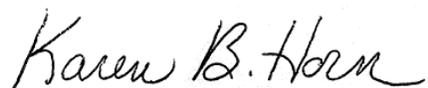
The Governor issued his Emergency Executive Order 01-20 on March 13, 2020 and it served Vermonters extremely well through the first year of the pandemic. Back in the spring of this year and most of last year, Vermont was the envy of the nation. Through most of the spring and summer, the moving average of new cases in Vermont was in the single digits. In response, when Vermont hit the 80 percent vaccination rate among eligible Vermonters on June 15, Governor Scott rescinded all state COVID 19 restrictions and ended the declared state of emergency.

Clearly, we are not out of the woods. Even with a 90 percent vaccination rate our cases are rocketing up. And the number of breakthrough cases is concerning. Vermont is a significant and unwelcome outlier in the national downward trend of cases right now. Governor Scott continues to encourage mask wearing, getting vaccinated and socially distancing.

Is encouragement enough? We know that masks work. Several communities moved to impose a mask mandate this fall when cases started going up again. However, Governor Scott's administration has determined that the selectboard or city council and local health officer need to ask permission to impose a mask mandate now that the emergency order is no longer in effect. They could grant that authority and allow selectboards and city councils to increase protection of their residents. The simple fact is, to date they have refused.

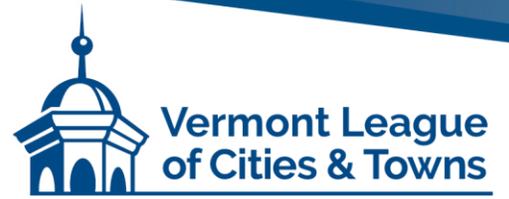
The administration could, in these uncertain times, grant local officials the authority to impose mask mandates at the local level when COVID transmission and caseloads in their communities warrant additional measures to assure public safety. Likewise, the legislature could extend that authority to local governing bodies. It is high time to provide the tools for towns to protect their residents.

Sincerely,



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