



Vermont Nurse Practitioners Association

P.O. Box 64773

Burlington, VT 05406

January 14, 2022

To: Senate Committee on Health & Welfare

From: Vermont Nurse Practitioners Association

Date: January 13, 2022

RE: Statewide Mask Mandate

The Vermont Nurse Practitioners Association (VNPA) works to promote the value and support the efforts of Vermont nurse practitioners providing accessible, high quality health care. VNPA respectfully offers the following comments in support of a statewide mask mandate.

Nurse practitioners and all health care workers have been on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic since March of 2020. This committee is certainly aware of the strain that the pandemic has placed on Vermont's health care system, and on the health care workforce. We also know there are effective, evidence-based measures to help decrease transmission of this virus— getting vaccinated, regularly testing, and wearing a mask. A high-quality mask protects both the wearer, and those around them by significantly decreasing the risk of COVID-19 exposure and transmission. While mask-wearing benefits everyone, it is particularly important in ensuring the protection of the most vulnerable members of our population.

VNPA supports the approach recommended to the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare by Dr. Lahey earlier this week— that a mandate be based on certain parameters, including the ebbing and flowing strain that the hospital system faces as a direct result of COVID-19 transmission, and rates of infected Vermonters.

The current approach— a patchwork of town-by-town mask mandates— is not the most effective approach for several reasons. First, it puts the onus on individual Vermonters to keep track of which towns have mandates, and which do not. It also puts local select boards in a difficult position, leaving

VNPA Board 2019-2020

Emily Alfano ■ Allison Ebrahimi ■ Nicole Hackney ■ Callan Janoweic ■ Alexander Johnston

Emily LeVan ■ Hillary Liddick ■ Megan O'Brien ■ Dayna Stimson ■ Michelle Wade ■ Martha Whitfield

interpreting and acting upon the latest public health guidance up to local officials. High-quality masks are now widely available and their use to slow viral transmission should be a statewide response. This will increase the stability of the health care workforce by ensuring a safer environment for these hardworking Vermonters when in public spaces.

It's worth noting that not only is a mask mandate a critical public health measure to help decrease the spread of COVID-19, but it is also popular among Vermonters. According to a Vermont Public Radio poll released earlier this week, most Vermonters support a mandate to require wearing face masks in public.

The CDC's current guidance is clear that everyone should mask– vaccinated or not– in indoor public places where there is high likelihood of transmission. Vermont currently faces record high numbers of infected individuals, and our public policy should reflect those numbers. By taking a proactive, rather than reactive approach at mitigating the spread of the Omicron variant and future mutations, Vermont can do what Vermont does best: putting the safety and wellbeing of our communities first.

Thank you for considering these recommendations.

Michelle Wade, MSN/Ed, APRN, NP-C, ACNP-AG

VNPA Board 2019-2020

Emily Alfano ■ Allison Ebrahimi ■ Nicole Hackney ■ Callan Janoweic ■ Alexander Johnston

Emily LeVan ■ Hillary Liddick ■ Megan O'Brien ■ Dayna Stimson ■ Michelle Wade ■ Martha Whitfield