

April 2, 2025

Dear Vermont Senate Committee on Government Operations:

I'm writing on behalf of the Vermont Center for Independent Living regarding S.81 in our complete support of the bill and our ask that you reach out to people living with chronic health conditions and disabilities as well as their families and caregivers to hear directly on why being proactive and stating that masks are allowable is an important step for the Vermont legislature to take.

VCIL is an organization of people with disabilities working together for dignity, independence and civil rights. Since 1979 we've been working to address issues that affect individuals with disabilities. Until 2020 when masking became something society was doing, people with disabilities and people living with chronic health conditions would wear masks without much trouble. In fact, those in health care facilities would encourage mask use if someone had a simple cold to help not spread infection. After 2020, mask usage became a political issue and the people suffering from this fallout are people with disabilities, for simply living their lives. It's become difficult for individuals to publicly come forward with their stories because they are harassed by the very entities that are there to serve them.

Once states like New York and National conversations started in on mask bans Vermonters began reaching out to VCIL to ask if we could proactively do something about this, because once the conversation turns to banning masks it once again becomes political and not about the personal survival individuals are facing. These waves of bans are akin to banning wheelchairs, hearing aids, and other assistive technology. Because that's what medical masks are—they provide disabled Vermonters with access to their community, healthcare, and education. And we shouldn't have to wait for it to happen for this committee to take action when we know it's coming.

When politicians nationally and locally start talking about banning masks, which they have we have additional issues. While existing laws may help protect individuals that meet the definition of disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act, they do not protect family members and caregivers who are supporting people at high risk for infection, nor do they protect any other Vermonters who seeking common sense measures to protect themselves from contracting or spreading infectious disease such as measles, flu, COVID, and more. This legislation can help address that proactively.

We once again respectfully ask that your committee take testimony from individuals with disabilities and chronic conditions, as well as family members, and proactively take this bold step as a legislature protecting our communities. As we saw during the height of the COVID pandemic, health disparities were exacerbated by local decision making, with the most rural areas dropping protections in schools and healthcare facilities quickly—in some cases a year before our more populous areas. These are the towns that are most likely to ban masks if this law is not passed. Rural, disabled Vermonters are already navigating nonstop challenges and this should not be another one added to their burden.

We have compiled testimonials from people with disabilities and their families who are concerned about mask bans locally, statewide and in our nation, and we invite you to check it out here: [H.81 Testimonials](#)

Yours truly,

Sarah Launderville

Sarah Launderville
Executive Director