



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

August 25, 2021

The Honorable Jake Corman
President Pro Tempore
Senate of Pennsylvania
350 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

The Honorable Bryan Cutler
Speaker
Pennsylvania House of Representatives
139 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear President Pro Tempore Corman and Speaker Cutler:

On May 18, 2021, Pennsylvanians voted to provide the General Assembly with a greater role in the management of emergencies in Pennsylvania. The next day, I reached out to you and other legislative leaders to express my desire to build on the accomplishments of our joint Vaccine Task Force and continue to work together. I write today to again ask that we work together to manage this ongoing COVID-19 emergency.

Over the past several weeks, despite joint efforts through the Vaccine Task Force that have made Pennsylvania one of the national leaders in vaccinations, COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths have all been on a sharp rise (though fortunately, at this time, not at the same rate as other states), right at the time when our students, teachers and support staff are heading back to the classroom. During this same time period, I have become increasingly concerned about misinformation being spread to try to discredit a school district's clear ability to implement masking to protect their students and staff, and the premise of local control being usurped by the threat – implicit or explicit – of political consequences for making sound public health and education decisions.

Recently, my administration has seen an outpouring of calls from parents, teachers, pediatricians and others urging action to mandate masking in K-12 classrooms due to the inaction of many school districts. This is not due to an organized form letter campaign. Constituents, primarily parents of young children who are not able to be vaccinated, are very concerned about the lack of a mask mandate in their school district. They report that their school districts are either refusing to implement them because of political pressure or false claims about their efficacy. Overwhelmingly, these parents' messages favor a statewide mask mandate for schools, especially in schools where children cannot be vaccinated yet. I have also been contacted by the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics imploring action.

Despite the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's recommendation that all K-12 schools should require masks, strikingly, as of July 30, only 59 school districts out of the 474 that submitted health and safety plans to the Department of Education have implemented mandatory masking policies. It is clear that action is needed to ensure children are safe as they return to school.

For most of the past 18 months, the legislature has asked for my administration to defer to local governments and local organizations when making mitigation decisions. We have done that to the extent possible while still providing broad public health guidance. Now instead of letting school districts,

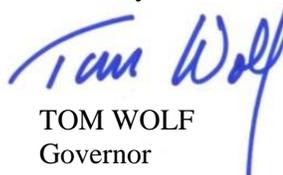
universities, and other organizations make these decisions free of duress, some in the legislature appear to be pressuring these organizations to make specific decisions. There has been legislation proposed to take decision-making authority away from school districts, and some legislators have wrongly suggested that schools districts lack the authority to mandate masks.

When students need to quarantine due to COVID-19 infection or exposure, their learning is interrupted by another transition out of the classroom. Additionally, parents may need to stay home from work to take care of them, which in turn means that workers cannot work – making workers, businesses and in turn our entire economy suffer both in the short and long term. The same logic holds true for child care centers. The science is clear that masks reduce virus transmission and that they, along with our vaccination efforts, give us the best chance to keep our classrooms and child care centers open instead of having them shut down due to COVID infections among Pennsylvania’s children.

As we continue to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, my administration has sought to include the legislature in our efforts and make the process more collaborative. I am asking you to call the General Assembly back to Harrisburg immediately to work with me to pass legislation that will require schools and child care centers to implement masking requirements while in the classroom. My administration will continue to monitor the situation, communicate and work with the General Assembly and take actions as needed to keep our children safe, and in the classroom. With school having already started in many areas of the state, the time to act is now.

Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



TOM WOLF
Governor

cc: The Honorable Kim Ward, Majority Leader, Senate of Pennsylvania
The Honorable Kerry Benninghoff, Majority Leader, Pennsylvania House of Representatives
The Honorable Jay Costa, Democratic Leader, Senate of Pennsylvania
The Honorable Joanna McClinton, Democratic Leader, Pennsylvania House of Representatives