

DEPUTATION IN WRITING

REGIONAL COUNCIL

JULY 9, 2020

Subject: Letter to the York Regional Council re: July 9th meeting on masking in public

Spokesperson: Samantha Alphonso

Name of Group or person(s) being represented (if applicable):

Brief summary of issue or purpose of deputation:

Dear Respected Council Members:

My name is Samantha Alphonso and I live in York Region, near the town of Newmarket. I am writing to you because I heard that you will be holding a meeting tomorrow, July 9th, 2020, to discuss the issue of whether the use of masks or face coverings ought to become a mandatory practice in York Region, and enforceable by bi-law in indoor public places and outdoor public places where physical distancing cannot be maintained.

While our Premier has stated to the media that masking will not be mandatory in our province, I have read about several instances of municipal governments creating bi-laws in which require businesses to bar entrance to people not wearing face masks/coverings and fining people for being out in public without a mask. Before moving to York Region, I resided in Guelph, where I still have many friends and family members. Guelph was one of the first cities to require masking in public and we have had some time now to see how this policy has played out. The implementation of these mandatory face covering practices, meant to protect the public from the spread of Covid-19, has resulted in many unhappy citizens and discrimination towards those who cannot wear a mask in public for medical reasons. This is because employees paid to guard the doors for their employers, bi-law officers, and business owners are not medical professionals or trained in the finer points of medical ethics. They are engaging in discriminatory practices in the interests of avoiding fines, professional disciplinary actions and business closures for not enforcing the masking of every citizen. The social distancing measures which have been implemented over the past several months have made shopping, running businesses, going to work, maintaining social relationships, and caring for children more difficult for every Canadian citizen. Implementing further restrictions and making these basic tasks even more difficult is not acceptable when the number of Covid-19 hospitalizations and deaths have been steadily declining for many weeks. We were asked to social distance in order to decrease the number of people needing hospitalization all at the same time and to avoid overwhelming our healthcare system, not to stamp out the disease and eliminate all spread. The first goal is meant to be short term, to buy time to increase hospital capacity and minimize preventable deaths. It is a realistic goal and has reportedly been achieved. The second is an unrealistic goal because it cannot be achieved. Please consider which goal you are pursuing as you discuss the merits and disadvantages of implementing universal masking in public places.

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Whenever there is a universally applied health measure, there are always risks and benefits, with some individuals benefiting more than others, and other people being vulnerable to experiencing the risks. This is because every human body is different. In choosing which public health measures are to be universally applied to every body, the benefits must outweigh the risks. The downsides or risks of universal masking include: every single person feels uncomfortable (especially in the heat of summer), all these masks pose an environmental risk due to the excess garbage created, nobody can see other people's faces fully (this is a problem when the majority of communication and identification is non-verbal, and of particular concern for the hearing impaired), verbal communication for all people becomes difficult because our voices are muffled when we speak to each other, some people have health conditions which mean they cannot wear the masks and will experience discrimination in accessing public spaces and purchasing necessary items / services, masks block vision for people who wear glasses and must contend with them constantly fogging up, and people with anxiety/PTSD/autism/other psychological conditions can have episodes triggered by wearing the masks themselves and seeing other people wearing masks. Furthermore, there are numerous scientific arguments that wearing a mask is both unsanitary and unhelpful in preventing the spread of illness when utilized by people other than trained professionals. I understand that this is a scientifically debateable topic, with evidence evolving on both sides of the argument for and against the use of masks. However, the validity of scientific arguments on the effectiveness of universal masking is not the primary issue I see as relevant to the decision of the York Regional Council. The relevant question I believe you ought to be discussing tomorrow is the proper role of the municipal government in mandating and enforcing public health measures which have been suggested to the public and whether the municipalities should have the power to regulate individual citizens' health decisions. There are some serious ethical problems with requiring everyone to mask and restricting access to public places / services if they cannot or choose not to comply. As Canadian citizens, we have the right to make decisions about our health and wearing a mask over our faces is clearly a medical decision. We also have the right to wear what we wish, with the exclusion of choosing to be totally naked in public. In all medical decisions, it is our individual right to receive informed consent, as guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Informed consent cannot be obtained through the use of coercion (lying, manipulation, deprivation, threats, fines and the use of force), it must be freely chosen. Threatening citizens with fines for not wearing masks is a clear use of coercion to ensure compliance. Our medical rights are there to ensure that people are able to freely make decisions about what is right for their individual body, not the bodies of other people. There are no instances where it is legally acceptable to coerce a patient to sacrifice their comfort, health, medical rights, and psychological well-being for the benefit of certain groups of vulnerable people. It is also not acceptable to make rules for the benefit of certain vulnerable groups that create discrimination against other vulnerable groups. If citizens hear about the protective benefits of masking and decide to cover their faces while in public places for the benefit of others, that is also their right. Many people in York Region have been persuaded that this course of action is right for them. Please allow individuals to maintain this ability to decide for themselves what the right course of action is by refusing to implement mandatory masking in York Region.

Thank you for your time and attention. I will be watching, with interest, the meeting taking place tomorrow and look forward to learning the outcome of your decisions on the issue of mandatory masking.

Sincerely,

Samantha Alphonso

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