

Brian Farnen, Former State Representative
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Dear Honorable Members of the Public Health Committee,

In March 2020, our world drastically changed with COVID-19. From social distancing to Zoom meetings and online education, everything in our lives was upended. Elderly people in nursing homes were dying and our frontline workers were angels among us. It was a scary time and we didn't know very much about the pandemic. Slowly, and overtime, life has become more normal for many of us. Some of us have returned to in-office work, we're socializing more and more and thanks to science, we know more about COVID.

As we enter year three, it is clear that COVID has taken a hard toll on our children. Anxiety, suicide rates and depression in our children have increased significantly. We also saw a requested increase in Fairfield's Special Education budget directly linked to the struggles students are facing. We've also learned that many of our kids are facing issues with mask wearing where it may impair non-verbal communication cues, it can be a barrier to socialization and overall learning.

I am hopeful that Governor Lamont's recent announcement on removing the statewide mask mandate starting February 28th stands. But we need to be vigilant that this decision does not come with unreasonable additional burdens that make it difficult for parents, staff and teachers to remove their masks in schools.

Additionally, with the abundance of federal COVID funds, the State should also (1) include a remote option to be made available for those with documented higher risk for severe COVID or have a loved one in their home at higher risk and (2) bolster after school and summer programs so kids who have fallen behind can catch up.

We need elected leaders to speak publicly and passionately for our children and not make decisions based on the political whim of the day in an election year. School mask mandates must end as soon as possible without additional unreasonable bureaucratic hoops, strings attached or state guidance that could inhibit parental choice. Our children need to be children and see their classmates and teachers' faces again.

Sincerely,

Brian Farnen

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