

Testimony of
Carol Gale, President
Hartford Federation of Teachers, Local 1018
Continuation of Emergency Declarations and Limited Executive Orders
Public Health Committee
February 8, 2022

Greetings members of the Public Health Committee. My name is Carol Gale and I have been president of the Hartford Federation of Teachers for 2 years, and a Hartford Public School teacher for 30 years. I am here to testify in favor of extending the mask mandate for schools. Our teachers have risen to the challenge of teaching during a pandemic for two years now, not without risk to their own personal health and safety. So far this school year we have had 311 staff and 1446 students contract covid leading to increased absences. We can't afford to increase absences for students or staff if we want positive academic outcomes. Our educators recognize the importance of in-person learning, and they deserve to be safe on the job. A mask mandate offers safety by containing the spread of droplets. As much as we would all love to stop wearing masks, it is too soon to lift this simple and effective mitigation strategy.

Additionally, many of our educators have lost considerable sick time due to required quarantines. Expanding the Covid Relief Funds to cover paid administrative leave for Covid related sick time would go a long way towards showing our educators they are appreciated and help with staff retention. School staff at all levels continue to resign due to the overwhelming job expectations leaving their colleagues to cover the staffing gaps left behind. To stem the tide of staffing shortages in our schools, our educators must be appreciated and provided safe supportive working conditions.

I urge you to extend the mask mandate for this school year. Feel free to contact me with any questions. Thank you.

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