

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 10, 2022

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden:

We write with serious concern that your administration continues to impose a mask mandate on toddlers and young children across the nation participating in the Head Start program, even after the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) revised its guidance to no longer recommend indoor masking for the vast majority of Americans.

Young children should never have been forced to wear masks, as they are at the least risk of serious complications from COVID-19 and could suffer the greatest developmental harm from having their faces covered.^{1 2} Yet your administration's authoritarian drive to impose mask and vaccine mandates on the American people included the issuing of a rule which requires universal masking in Head Start programs for all individuals aged two years and older. Imposing such a mandate under the guise of an update to the Head Start Program Performance Standards exceeds the authority granted by Congress and takes important decision-making away from parents and local communities. As such, the mandate is subject to preliminary injunctions preventing its enforcement in 25 states.³

Following the CDC's February 25th revision of the public health metrics underlying its mask guidelines, the CDC no longer recommends masking indoors for over 70 percent of the country given current COVID-19 community levels. In light of this change, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) sent a notice to Head Start providers stating that the Office of Head Start will not evaluate compliance with the mask requirement in program monitoring, but that "Head Start programs should continue to follow the requirements laid out in the IFC [Interim final rule with comment] in all states not subject to preliminary injunction."⁴ Without clear direction that the mask mandate has been rescinded, Head Start providers in many local communities continue to follow the rule and require young children to wear masks.

¹ Risk for COVID-19 Infection, Hospitalization, and Death By Age Group, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/investigations-discovery/hospitalization-death-by-age.html>

² Stajduhar, Andreja et al. "Face masks disrupt holistic processing and face perception in school-age children." *Cognitive research: principles and implications* vol. 7, 1 9. 7 Feb. 2022, doi:10.1186/s41235-022-00360-2

³ HHS Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, Universal Masking and COVID-19 Vaccine Requirement FAQs <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/exploring-head-start-program-performance-standards/article/universal-masking-covid-19-vaccine-requirement-faqs>

⁴ Office of Head Start, CDC Community Levels Recommendations and Mask Wearing, <https://tmsc.createsend.com/campaigns/reports/viewCampaign.aspx?d=j&c=3A108D6223F50AA6&ID=AB3F63F79F75CFE62540EF23F30FEDED&temp=False&tx=0&source=SnapshotHtml>

In your State of the Union address, you said, "Most Americans in most of the country can now be mask free" and "COVID-19 need no longer control our lives." While you attempt to declare victory over the pandemic, it is unconscionable that your administration continues to impose its harmful mask mandate on two-year-old children who participate in Head Start. We urge you to fix this immediately and direct ACF to rescind the rule mandating masks for Head Start participants.

Thank you for your consideration of this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



Elise M. Stefanik
Member of Congress



Virginia Foxx
Member of Congress



Madison Cawthorn
Member of Congress



Scott Fitzgerald
Member of Congress



Tom McClintock
Member of Congress



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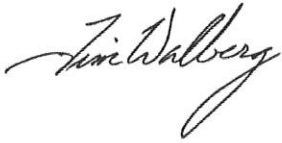
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