



House of Representatives
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
HARRISBURG

August 21, 2020

Rachel Levine, Secretary
Pennsylvania Department of Health
Health & Welfare Bldg, 8th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Pedro A. Rivera, Secretary
Pennsylvania Department of Education
333 Market Street, 10th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17126

Dear Secretaries Levine and Rivera,

As schools across Pennsylvania are reopening or finalizing their plans to start the 2020-2021 school year, we are writing to express our shared frustration and the frustration of our constituents regarding your August 17, 2020, mandate that students returning to in-person learning wear a mask at all times with limited exceptions.

School leaders have been working for months to develop reopening plans in a way that keeps both children and educators safe from contracting COVID-19. Part of that preparation included following clear guidance issued by your departments in July that said masks may be dispensed with if children were kept socially distant at six feet apart.

Following that clear guidance, and understanding that the governor has given local control to school leaders on how to reopen, schools planning to reopen to in-person learning went through painstaking measures to reconfigure classrooms and alter class sizes to accommodate six feet of distance between students.

While educators and students should feel free to wear a mask should they feel it is necessary to keep themselves and/or others safe, this mandate is not what our children, parents, and school officials needed when looking to the administration for consistency and certainty in reopening for in-person learning.

It also runs counter to the notion of local control over school reopening espoused by the governor. We believe local control is and should remain paramount in any discussion on

reopening. It does not make any sense why policies that work in places like Allegheny County or Philadelphia are necessary in our most rural areas, some of which have only been affected by this virus in limited ways.

For months, both lawmakers and school officials have asked for guidance on how to reopen safely. Instead, your departments have issued conflicting and contradictory guidance and mandates, often late in the stages of preparation.

In short, the guidance or mandates you offer do not provide the assistance being asked for by on the ground leaders and this most recent mask mandate is not any different.

Asked about the guidance being received from your departments, Mark DiRocco, the Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators said, “[T]he sand shifting beneath the feet of school leaders makes it frustrating to deal with. ... It’s hard to make plans when things change on a weekly basis.”

Moving forward, we request that any guidance on reopening prioritize local control, reopening schools to in-person education, and clarity and certainty for school leaders.

Our children deserve nothing less than our best efforts to provide them a safe, learning environment and the best educational opportunities possible.

We trust you will work with us—and not against us—in attaining these shared goals.

Sincerely,



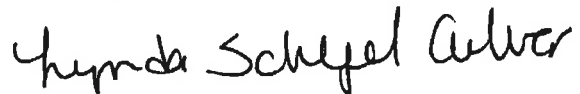
Tina Pickett
110th Legislative District



Kerry A. Benninghoff, Majority Leader
171st Legislative District



Martin Causer, Majority Policy Chair
67th Legislative District



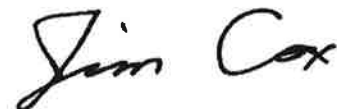
Lynda Schlegel Culver
108th Legislative District



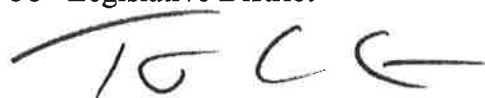
Bud Cook
49th Legislative District



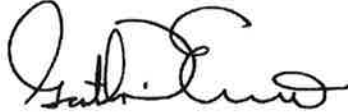
Eric Davanzo
58th Legislative District



Jim Cox
129th Legislative District



Torren Ecker
193rd Legislative District



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84th Legislative District



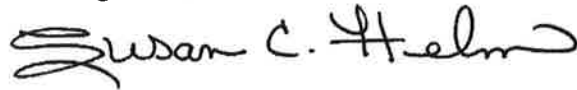
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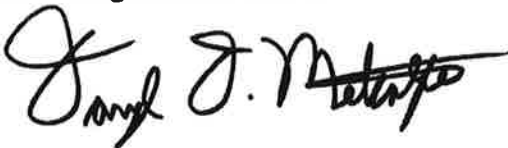
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65th Legislative District



Mike Reese, Majority Caucus Secretary
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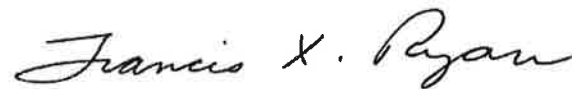
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