



CHICAGO TEACHERS UNION

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March 4, 2022

The Honorable Lori Lightfoot
Mayor
City of Chicago
121 N. LaSalle Street, 5th Floor
Chicago, Illinois 60602

Dear Mayor Lightfoot:

As you are aware, on Thursday, March 10, a judge in downstate Sangamon County, Illinois, will preside over a hearing that could potentially impact hundreds of thousands of students, educators and staff in Chicago Public Schools.

Tom Devore, a grifter hundreds of miles away from our city, is using CPS families for his own political gain. Devore is nothing but a fraud who wants to eliminate an effective tool that we have all fought for, and made sacrifices for to keep everyone in our school communities safe from COVID-19.

Now that we are again trending in the right direction, we cannot afford to have any avoidable disruptions in our buildings. We also cannot give someone like Devore — with no agency, no base in Chicago, and no skin in our city or our public schools — the ability to recklessly impact the health of the people in our school communities.

I find your plan to lift the CPS mask mandate in advance of the judge's ruling extremely troubling, especially considering Devore's intrusion and motives, but more important, our collective struggle in January to reach an agreement. Each round of negotiations between our Union and your team has been a challenge, but we have emerged each time with agreements that improved safety conditions in our school buildings.

Unilaterally moving to mask optional policy would immediately begin to undo that progress, and would be a clear violation of our January 12, 2022, COVID-19 Related Safety Protocols Memorandum of Agreement. That agreement extended the requirement under our February 2021 agreement that "all persons entering a CPS facility are required to wear a face mask properly covering their mouth and nose at all times" through the conclusion of the 2021-22 school year. Furthermore, it would threaten the health and safety of many of our students, who remain a largely unvaccinated population in schools on the South and West sides.

Now, more than ever, we need a partner in the Mayor's Office and Chicago Public Schools. We must put all of our support behind the residents of our city, because while we are no longer at odds with one another, we remain under attack by right-wing forces that want to disrupt the safety we have worked so hard to achieve. These are individuals with no stake in our schools, or our children, who are attempting to force policies that will impact the lives of nearly 400,000 students, educators and staffers in our district.

This is why our Memorandum of Agreement is so essential, and why it is important for the district to honor our collectively bargained commitments. Our city is currently in a much better place with COVID-19, with low numbers in deaths, positivity rates, cases and hospitalizations that we haven't experienced in months. We are fortunate to have survived the pandemic thus far, but this is only due to the caution and care we have taken to keep everyone in our school communities safe.



In school buildings, however, we have large numbers of children still not fully vaccinated in congregate settings and overcrowded classrooms. We also have medically fragile educators and students in buildings, simply because the mask mandate is in place. Removing the mask mandate would require the district to drastically improve accommodations by providing greater access to the Virtual Academy, and additional accommodations to staff with medical vulnerabilities for whom collective masking was of critical importance for their safety.

If CPS moves toward making masks optional without bargaining to do so safely, this refusal to honor our agreement will have consequences.

The current debate around masking is more than just a binary discussion of masks on or off. Our Union, your office, CPS, and the entire city have all been a part of intense and complex negotiations to keep people alive and safe, and our schools open and operational. As we look toward spring break and the final quarter of the school year, we must anticipate the climate to come and make contingencies that will maintain our right to fight for safety.

It has been an extremely challenging two (2) years, in many ways. Now is the time to come together, fend off outsiders, protect the most vulnerable in our school communities, and be true collaborators for the good of the students and the families we serve.

Sincerely,



Jesse Sharkey
President

JS:yv

cc: CPS CEO Pedro Martinez
Board of Education President Miguel del Valle
CPS Board Vice President Sendhil Revuluri
CPS Board Member Luisiana Meléndez
CPS Board Member Lucino Sotelo
CPS Board Member Elizabeth Todd-Breland
CPS Board Member Dwayne Truss