

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

REPRESENTATIVE ADAM WOOL

Session: January - April
State Capitol, Room 501
Juneau, AK 99801-1182
Phone: 907-465-4976

House Finance Committee

Interim: May - December
1292 Sadler Way, Ste. 308
Fairbanks, AK 99701
Phone: 907-452-6084



Dear Governor Dunleavy,

Every day we see that case counts of COVID are increasing across the state. Mortalities from COVID on the national level are setting records, and hospital capacity is starting to be maxed out. Staffing levels are stressed and are another choke point in the spectrum of treatment.

Alaska has not been immune to this pandemic. Although we have avoided the high number of deaths so far, our hospitals are starting to fill up. Our remote location prevents us from being able to use neighboring state facilities. As was recently stated in a letter from Foundation Health Partners board chair Jeff Cook, Seattle hospitals have said they would not accept Alaska overflow patients. The influx of patients and the limited capacity of our health care facilities presents potentially catastrophic consequences for our communities.

More than half the state's population is under a mask mandate due to the responsible action of municipal leaders. However, much of the state does not have this capability. In Fairbanks, our borough does not have health powers and our city mayor refuses to enact a mandate. While enforcement challenges are cited as a barrier to implementation, simply having a uniform statewide mandate sends a strong message that COVID is the emergency which the Governor's office has already declared it to be. Similar to the statewide smoking ban in place currently, a mask mandate will be followed by the majority of the general public simply because it is enshrined as a policy. If it would make some more comfortable you could consider making it applicable for a certain period of time, say 30 or 60 days, because that would give enough time to reduce cases to a manageable level.

Alaska is one of 12 states that do not have a mask mandate. The list includes: Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, and Tennessee. Unfortunately, this puts us on a list with some of the state with the highest case counts across the country.

Health leaders such as Jeff Cook (FHP), along with community leaders such as PJ Simon (TCC) who represents the Tanana Chiefs and its rural communities and health centers have affirmed Alaska's need for a mandate. We need to take action towards anything that will slow the spread of this terrible pandemic. We need to open schools, and to accomplish this we need to slow community spread. We wouldn't expect our kids to enter schools without a mask so why don't we expect the same of our citizens entering businesses and places of work? If wearing a mask was simply voluntary for school kids would that be acceptable?

Much like school openings, mask use should not be politicized and public health should be the number one priority. It is time to take decisive action and step up to lead us through this health crisis. We urge the Governor to take the lead that so many other states have done and implement a statewide mask mandate.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Adam Wool".


Representative Wool

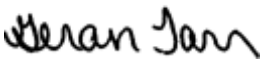

Representative Hopkins



Representative Hannan


Representative Kreiss-Tomkins


Representative Ortiz



Representative Josephson


Representative Tarr


Representative Drummond


Representative Zulkosky


Representative Spohnholz


Representative-Elect Snyder