

For Immediate Release

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Fight For The Future

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40+ Privacy, Civil Rights, Public Health, and Labor Organizations Sign Letter Urging Lawmakers to Denounce Mask Bans

WASHINGTON - A coalition of more than 40 civil rights organizations have penned an open letter raising the alarm about the growing trend of anti-mask legislation and urging lawmakers to oppose mask bans.

Read the full letter here.

This letter, from a coalition of groups championing privacy, civil liberties, reproductive freedom, disability rights, COVID justice, mutual aid, LGBTQ+ rights, Palestinian liberation, and labor power, comes just weeks after the news that a second Trump administration, keen on targeting political opposition, will once again operate a massive surveillance infrastructure and embolden violence against marginalized communities from the highest office in the country.

However, as the letter notes, banning masks has been a bipartisan effort a long time in the making, with both Democrats and Republicans in North Carolina, New York, Los Angeles, St. Louis, Louisville, and more driving the latest push to ban masks in response to masking at Palestine solidarity protests.

Rights experts cite three main concerns with anti-mask legislation: suppression of free expression, forced exposure to police and commercial surveillance, and increased violence against marginalized people. Notably, a new mask ban in Nassau County, New York has already been weaponized to arrest a pro-Palestine protester without cause, while maskers in North Carolina note that even before it formally passed, a statewide ban escalated public harassment.

The coalition argues that lawmakers should oppose mask bans regardless of health and religious exemptions, as exemptions are likely to be enforced

arbitrarily by police and do not prevent bans from stigmatizing masking in public. This creates a dangerous culture for all who mask to protect from a multitude of threats, including the ongoing risks of COVID and Long COVID, especially singling out immunocompromised and disabled people who have long masked to protect themselves in public.

The letter ends by calling on lawmakers to urgently denounce mask bans, oppose efforts to pass anti-mask legislation or revive defunct bans in their jurisdictions, and defend the right to mask in public for all.

The following can be attributed to Evan Greer (she/her), Director of Fight for the Future:

“It’s no surprise that fascists and science-deniers want to ban masks from protests. But it’s alarming that supposedly progressive lawmakers are helping them do it. There are many reasons to cover your face at a protest or in public, from defending yourself from harassment and doxing to protecting your community from COVID during an ongoing public health crisis. Like other anti-protest laws, these draconian measures will be selectively enforced, and used as an excuse by law enforcement to crack down on marginalized communities and protesters who they don’t like. Mask bans only escalate our current swing toward fascism and suffocating surveillance culture. It’s clear that the authoritarian desire to silence pro-Palestine and anti-racist activists is the main goal of this latest push for mask bans, but if they go into effect, they will impact everyone who dares to speak out and exercise their rights. We can’t let that happen.”

Several organizations who signed the letter provided additional comment:

Ricci Levy (she/her), President & CEO of Woodhull Freedom

Foundation writes, “Banning masks is a clear violation of personal autonomy and bodily freedom – fundamental human rights that the Woodhull Freedom Foundation has long defended. Just as we advocate for sexual freedom as a human right, we believe individuals have the right to make their own choices about their health and safety, including wearing masks. Government overreach that restricts personal freedoms, whether related to sexuality or public health measures, sets a dangerous precedent. We urge policymakers to respect human rights and individual liberty by allowing people to make their own informed decisions about mask usage.”

Shahinaz Geneid (she/they), UAW Labor for Palestine facilitator and

member of Unite All Workers for Democracy writes, “The labor movement and the Palestine movement must join the fight to stand against mask bans. We know all too well that the health of workers and everyday people, especially those of us in precarious employment positions, living under colonialism like our comrades in Palestine, or otherwise already at risk, will be placed at increasingly serious risk if these reactionary measures clearly meant to chill free speech by exposing pro-Palestine protesters to widespread surveillance and doxxing become the widespread norm, leaving workers unable to protect themselves from infection and potential long-term disability or death. Add to that the unequal and classist nature of the American healthcare system and the barriers that the working class in particular faces to accessing adequate healthcare when they do get sick, and it is clear that fighting anti-mask legislation must be all of our fight across movements.”

Sean O’Brien (he/him), founder, Yale Privacy Lab writes, “Masks provide

people with the potential for anonymity and vital protection from not only harassment but the pervasive and growing tendrils of surveillance in our society. Mask bans create a chilling effect on speech and allow for biased

and predictive policing, making it possible for facial recognition technology to follow individuals from protests and rallies all the way to their homes.”

Antoine Ghoston (he/him), Executive Director, Arkansas Black Gay Men’s Forum writes, “As an organization committed to the health and dignity of Black LGBTQ+ individuals, the Arkansas Black Gay Men’s Forum recognizes mask bans as a direct threat to our communities. They exacerbate health disparities and undermine public safety, disproportionately impacting those who are already vulnerable. Ensuring our community members have access to essential protections is non-negotiable.”

Jenna Sherman (she/her) Campaign Director at gender justice nonprofit UltraViolet writes, “The move to ban masks outright is an act of suppression under the guise of public safety. Particularly in an era of increased surveillance and facial recognition, people are living in fear of being targeted for what should be routine, protected parts of our lives like accessing reproductive healthcare. Everyone must have the right to choose to wear a mask regardless of whether it’s to protect their health or safeguard their privacy. The trend to revoke this right is deeply troubling, and has a disproportionate impact on women, trans people, and nonbinary people seeking out healthcare or protesting to fight for their right to do so.”

The full list of signers includes:

18 Million Rising

1021 Members for Palestine

Access Now

Adalah Justice Project

API Equality-LA

Arkansas Black Gay Men’s Forum

Assembly Four

Disability Rights California
Erotic Service Provider Legal Education and Research Project
Faith Choice Ohio
Fiat Fiendum
Freedom Oklahoma
Housing Works
If/When/How: Lawyering for Reproductive Justice
Jewish Voice for Peace
Lavender Phoenix
Long COVID Justice
Mask Bloc Louisville
Mask Bloc Sunset San Francisco
Mask Together America
Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition
MEAction NY
MediaJustice
Muslim Advocates
Oakland Privacy
PDX Privacy
Restore The Fourth
Richmond Reproductive Freedom Project
Secure Justice
Senior and Disability Action
Strategies for High Impact (S4HI)
SWOP Behind Bars
The Wayside
Transgender Education Network of Texas (TENT)
Transgender Law Center
UAW Labor for Palestine
UltraViolet

Unite All Workers for Democracy
United We Dream
Woodhull Freedom Foundation
Yale Privacy Lab

Fight for the Future is a group of artists, engineers, activists, and technologists who have been behind the largest online protests in human history, channeling Internet outrage into political power to win public interest victories previously thought to be impossible. We fight for a future where technology liberates -- not oppresses -- us.

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