

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

November 20, 2020

The Honorable Tom Wolf
Governor
Office of the Governor
508 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

The Honorable Rachel Levine, M.D.
Secretary of Health
Pennsylvania Department of Health
Health & Welfare Building
8th Floor West, 625 Forster
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Governor Wolf and Secretary Levine:

Schools across the Commonwealth have invested significant time and effort to develop health and safety protocols to protect student-athletes, while allowing them to compete this fall. Because of their efforts, transmission of infections between competitors has been virtually non-existent. The updated universal masking order issued by the Department of Health on November 17, 2020 lacks clarity as to how it applies to interscholastic athletics. We urge you to provide guidance for student athletes reflective of different sports and the athletes that participate in them.

It is clear that the updated masking order appears to apply to athletes regardless of the nature of competition they are engaged in. No neighboring state has seen the need to apply a mask mandate that does not include reasonable exceptions for individuals engaged in varying degrees and modes of physical activity. For example, the updated order fails to specify how it may be applied to sports such as swimming, wrestling and basketball, where wearing a mask may be impossible or unsafe. Furthermore, it inhibits the ability of student-athletes to develop skills and talents that will impact their future trajectory in life. While the risk of spreading infections in competition has already proven to be very low, there are also legitimate concerns about how this mandate may be applied to outdoor sports such as football and field hockey, both of which require mouthguards to be worn underneath helmets and which have conducted their seasons thus far with little incident.

The PIAA has reached out to your office three times since this order was announced seeking clarification, and still has not heard back. As you may know, winter sports begin practice today and fall sports will conclude their seasons with statewide championships taking place this weekend and next weekend. This is a time-sensitive issue affecting more than 650 schools in Pennsylvania. The Pittsburgh Steelers have confirmed that they have received an exemption from wearing a mask during future home games this season. Students across the Commonwealth have worked hard to ensure a safe return to in-person learning under very difficult circumstances and deserve the fair opportunity to safely participate in athletic competition this year.

Instead of a one-size-fits-all approach, we encourage your office to specify how this new mandate may apply to individual sports as well as empower local school districts to develop and enforce safe practices that fit their communities. Your attention to this matter will immediately affect the thousands of student-athletes across the commonwealth who are awaiting guidance on how to compete in a safe and healthy environment while allowing them to perform at the highest level.

Sincerely,



Daniel P. Meuser
Member of Congress



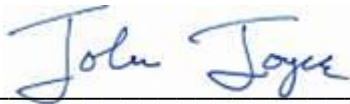
Glenn 'GT' Thompson
Member of Congress



Mike Kelly
Member of Congress



Brian Fitzpatrick
Member of Congress



John Joyce, M.D.
Member of Congress



Guy Reschenthaler
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Fred Keller
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