



Alachua County Board of County Commissioners

Ken Cornell, *Chair*
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Administration
Michele L. Lieberman
County Manager

September 9, 2021

kent.fuchs@ufl.edu

paul.broadie@sfcollge.edu

Dear Dr Fuchs and Dr. Broadie,

At Tuesday's September 7, 2021 County Commission meeting, the Board discussed public health mitigation measures in response to the COVID-19 Delta variant, prevalent in our community. The Board unanimously decided to continue its local state of emergency and its instituted masking requirement and signage for all indoor locations except private homes. The Board also discussed the University and College's mitigation measures. Our understanding is that your institutions are recommending, as opposed to requiring, that all persons wear masks in indoor locations.

Currently, our order specifically exempts all properties in the State University and College Systems from the County's requirements. At our Board meeting, our attorney was asked to opine on whether we could extend the order to impose these requirements on University and College properties. Her analysis is that, while your state governing bodies (Board of Governors and Board of Education, respectively) could have regulated in this area, to date they have chosen not to. In the absence of a prohibition, either of your respective boards could institute these requirements or, as a less preferable option, the County could remove properties in State University and College Systems from its exemption, thus applying the requirement to these properties.

I am writing on behalf of the entire Alachua County Commission to respectfully ask that you join the County, the School Board, the City of Gainesville, and our local businesses in instituting the common-sense safety measures spelled out in the County's Short-Term Emergency Order 21-25. It simply requires masking indoors.

We owe it to our healthcare professionals, residents, students, employees, and especially the most vulnerable in our community to do what we can to stem the tide of this Delta variant surge.

The CDC has designated Alachua County as being in the high community transmission category, meaning 100 or more cases for every 100,000 people, and/or lab test positivity rate for COVID-19 that is 10% or higher. Because of the increased incidence of infection due to the Delta variant of COVID-19, the CDC now recommends that face masks are worn indoors by individuals who are vaccinated and

unvaccinated as both can transmit the virus, and the Delta variant has proven to be more virulent than other widespread variants.

Before mandating indoor masking, the Commission received extensive testimony from experts at UF Health and the State Department of Health who made it clear that indoor masking is an essential mitigation strategy to reduce the community spread of this disease, which we know will, in turn, reduce the burden upon the health system and save lives.

As we showed from the beginning of the pandemic, we can reduce the spread of this disease and protect our community when our institutions work together. As expressed by the experts at the University of Florida, to allow hundreds of individuals to gather indoors on campus without masking poses an avoidable danger to the students, faculty and our Community.

While we fight the spread of this Delta variant, we hope that our nationally recognized educational institutions will seriously consider the implementation of similar masking requirements, both for the protection of your university and college community, and the protection of the Alachua County community, at large.

Finally, under Chapter 2021-8 of the Laws of Florida, the Board of County Commissioners is required to meet every seven days to evaluate the potential extension and modification of the emergency order granted under the Section 252.38(4)(2021). Our Board will obviously consider any information you provide or any actions you take in response to this letter at its next meeting scheduled for Tuesday, September 14, 2021.

We hope that you will consider the necessity for these requirements and will join us in enforcing the indoor masking requirements, whomever imposes them.

Thank you for considering this request. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Ken Cornell, Chair
Alachua County Commission
Chr21.050

cc: Board of County Commissioners
Michele L. Lieberman, County Manager
Sylvia Torres, County Attorney
Paul Myers, Administrator, Alachua County Health Department