



Ottawa County
Corporation Counsel

Douglas W. Van Essen
Corporation Counsel

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Ms. Lisa Stefanovsky
Health Officer
Ottawa County

Re: Religious or Political Speech Exception to Mask Mandates

Dear Ms. Stefanovsky:

You have asked me to analyze whether there are religious or political speech exceptions to the limited mask pandemic order that you, as Ottawa County Health Officer, issued on Friday, August 20, 2021. The order mandates that all children attending physical school and teachers or staff serving them in in grades pre-K through 6 wear masks while indoors and extends until a vaccination for those children becomes available, plus 60 days for parents to obtain it or decided against it, or until Ottawa County drops to the “low” COVID transmission level from its current “high” status.

In my opinion, the answer to your question is, “No.” There is no political speech or religious exemption under your Order.

There is an exemption for

“Persons who have a medical reason confirmed in writing from a Medical Doctor (MD) or Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (DO) currently licensed to practice medicine in the State of Michigan.”

Parents wishing to avail themselves of this Order need two things:

1. A slip signed by their child’s doctor; and that
2. Identifies a medical condition that the child suffers from that precludes their patient from wearing a mask.

The slip should be presented to the School and if the School has any questions, should be presented to the Health Officer who has the final say as to whether it meets the exemption.

Very Truly Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Douglas W. Van Essen', written over a white background.

Douglas W. Van Essen
Ottawa County Corporation Counsel

Al Vanderberg, Ottawa County Administrator
John Shay, Deputy County Administrator