

August 20, 2021

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
Office of the Director  
395 E Street SW  
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Director Walensky,

I write to request that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention extend a clarification that Local Education Agencies (LEAs) have the freedom to determine their own masking policies on the school buses they pay to operate. It appears the June 10, 2021 order was developed without adequate consideration for rural or isolated communities, and subverts the authority of LEAs.

Montana has both densely populated cities and remote communities and we still maintain more than 50 one room school houses. No matter which district, Montanans are committed to local control. The parents and other trustees that are elected to school boards understand the needs of their students and communities better than Washington could ever hope to. Decisions affecting the health and well-being of students must be made as close to the classroom as possible.

President Biden's Executive Order 13998 requires masks to be worn on all public vehicles, though school buses are not accessible to the general public and were therefore not covered. However, the order issued by your agency on June 10th explicitly extended this requirement to school buses with limited exceptions for passengers. I have heard significant concerns about the impact of this order from school board members and superintendents alike.

The Department of Education's COVID-19 Handbook, which you cite for guidance on school bus health and safety, encourages parents to drive their children to school. For the parents who work from the pre-dawn hours until long after dark, this is simply unfeasible and school buses are essential in my state. In small farming and ranching towns it is common to find K-12 schools with low double-digit enrollment. School boards are currently deciding if masks will be required in the schools of their respective LEA based on their COVID situation. These same boards are best equipped to develop and implement local school bus ordinances.

STEVE DAINES  
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## United States Senate

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This fall, a significant proportion of Montana students will return to their classrooms without masks. Forcing young children to wear masks on the school bus, only to arrive at school and remove them makes no sense. Furthermore, it exposes an intrusion of the federal government into the daily operation of local school districts. I am not alone in my concern over this latest effort of the Biden administration to consolidate its control over public education and I urge you to withdraw this mandate.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



STEVE DAINES  
United States Senator