



July 15, 2022

Dr. Barbara Ferrer  
Los Angeles County Department of Public Health  
313 N. Figueroa Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Sent via email

RE: Potential Reinstatement of LA County Indoor Mask Mandate

Dear Dr. Ferrer:

The California Retailers Association represents retailers, large and small, from across the state of California, including many retailers in Los Angeles County, who have been on the front lines of dealing with COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic. Our priority has always been the health and safety of our employees and customers.

Retailers across Los Angeles County pivoted to safety protocols, invested in PPE for employees and customers, encouraged vaccines for employees and customers, provided other options for shopping – delivery and curbside pick-up, and promoted our “Safe Shopping” campaign to encourage safe shopping practices.

Retailers understand the COVID-19 pandemic is ever-changing and is hard to predict. We applaud the efforts of your office and the Board of Supervisors to provide free access to vaccines, testing, and masks – they have proved to be effective and should be continued. As an industry that is consumer centric, we recognize the health and social impacts of COVID-19, and the incredible economic hardships this pandemic has caused for communities across Los Angeles County.

Retailers, especially independent, community-based retailers, are just now beginning to rebound from the financial trauma they experienced, and now retailers, large and small, are increasingly concerned about new, additional consequences of reinstating an indoor mask mandate. Enforcing mask mandates was one of the most challenging aspects of operating during the pandemic. Retail employees were frequently verbally abused and, in some cases, physically abused while trying to enforce compliance. Requiring masks may have made sense when vaccines were not yet available but given the widespread availability of vaccines and booster shots today, it is hard to argue that masks are necessary to protect the health and safety of employees and customers. In fact, a mandate may lead to more harm than good for employees who once again may become the butt of enforcement backlash from some customers. Requiring masks puts retail employees, including women, veterans, and young people, in the impossible position of enforcing a mandate that many customers no longer wish to – or are unwilling to – comply with, and we are very concerned about the impact this will have on the physical and mental wellbeing of our employees.

Businesses, including retailers, are working every day to recover from the pandemic, while facing workforce shortages, supply chain challenges, increased retail theft, and more. Retailers should not be expected to enforce a mask mandate in addition to these ongoing challenges, and retailers cannot shoulder this compliance burden alone as we have been required to do in the past.

As of July 11, 2022, no other county in the state has a mask mandate in place and reinstating a mask mandate runs counter to the state’s priority of shifting from a pandemic response to one of an endemic strategy. We have all followed the lead of Governor Newsom and recommendations from the California Department of Public Health and the Governor recently showed the state is entering a new phase of the pandemic by rolling back 95 percent of all executive orders related to COVID-19. Our new phase is one of personal choice in how we live with COVID-19 and having Los Angeles County be an outlier to this will only cause more frustration and confusion for businesses and residents who operate, reside, and shop in the county. A better approach may be to continue the messaging to strongly encourage all individuals wear a mask when indoors instead of forcing individuals and making them feel forced to wear a mask by a government body.

For the reasons listed, and on behalf of retailers who operate in Los Angeles County, I ask for your consideration to all potential impacts, including increased mental and physical abuse of retail employees, before implementing a mandatory mask mandate.

Sincerely,



Rachel Michelin  
President & CEO  
California Retailers Association

cc: Los Angeles County Supervisor Hilda Solis, First District  
Los Angeles County Supervisor Holly Mitchell, Second District  
Los Angeles County Supervisor Sheila Kuehl, Third District  
Los Angeles County Supervisor Janice Hahn, Fourth District  
Los Angeles County Supervisor Kathryn Barger, Fifth District