



August 24, 2021

The Honorable Henry McMaster
State House
1100 Gervais Street
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Dear Governor McMaster,

On behalf of the nearly 500 people in South Carolina living with cystic fibrosis (CF), we write to urge South Carolina to amend budget bill H. 4100 to exempt all K-12 schools from policies prohibiting mask requirements to ensure the necessary flexibility to protect students and staff during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, we urge you to direct school districts to offer remote learning during the 2021-2022 academic year if masks are not mandated as an accommodation for students at higher risk for severe illness from the virus, including those with CF.

About cystic fibrosis and COVID-19

Cystic fibrosis is a life-threatening genetic disease that affects more than 30,000 people in the United States, including 250 children in South Carolina. CF is a complex, multi-system disease that causes the body to produce thick, sticky mucus that clogs the lungs and digestive system, which can lead to life-threatening infections. Cystic fibrosis is both serious and progressive; while great strides have been made in the treatment of the disease, lung damage caused by infection is irreversible and can have a lasting impact on length and quality of life.

As COVID-19 continues to present a serious and ongoing risk to South Carolina residents, both children and adults living with CF remain at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19, as compared to those without underlying conditions.¹ Community transmission of the virus remains high in South Carolina and, as of August 23rd, over 17,300 new cases in South Carolina have been reported in the past week, the 13th highest number of any state in the country.² In light of the recent emergence of the Delta and other new variants, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has recommended that Americans continue to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 and protect those who are most vulnerable to infection.³

Amend Budget Bill H. 4100 to extend flexibility for all K-12 schools

The Cystic Fibrosis Foundation believes that in-person learning is vital for children's social development and emotional well-being. However, especially in the absence of approved vaccinations for children under age 12, precautions like masking remain a vital tool in preventing infection and spread of the virus; both the CDC and American Academy of Pediatrics recommend universal masking in schools at this time, with the goal of keeping students safe and physically present in school.^{4,5} We support these recommendations and urge school districts to require all teachers, staff, students, and visitors at K-12 schools to wear masks at school, regardless of vaccination status, to ensure a safe return to in-person learning.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/children/symptoms.html#higher-risk>

² https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#cases_casesper100klast7days

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html>

⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html>

⁵ <https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/covid-19-planning-considerations-return-to-in-person-education-in-schools/>

Extend remote learning accommodations for the 2021-2022 academic year

In addition to allowing school districts the flexibility to implement safety measures for their staff and students, we urge you to direct school districts in South Carolina to extend remote learning as an accommodation for high-risk students and their families, including children with CF and their siblings, if they do not implement a mask requirement. This request echoes the recommendations of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) that “special considerations and accommodations to account for the diversity of youth should be made, especially for populations facing inequities, including those who are medically fragile or complex.”⁶ The Cystic Fibrosis Foundation believes that the decision to return to in-person learning should be made on a case-by-case basis and is best left to a child’s family and their care team.

The Cystic Fibrosis Foundation urges you to swiftly amend budget bill H. 4100 to permit all K-12 schools to implement mask requirements and to advise local school districts to adopt remote learning as an option for people with CF and their families during the 2021-2022 academic year if masking is not required. We stand ready to serve as a resource to the legislature and to the state as they plan for the reopening of K-12 schools this fall. Please contact Sage Rosenthal at srosenthal@cff.org or (301) 841-2632 if you would like to discuss this issue further.

Sincerely,



Mary B. Dwight
Chief Policy & Advocacy Officer
Senior Vice President, Policy & Advocacy

cc: Hon. Harvey Peeler, Senate President Pro Tempore
Hon. James Lucas, Speaker, House of Representatives
Hon. Tommy Pope, Speaker Pro Tempore, House of Representatives
Hon. A. Shane Massey, Senate Majority Leader
Hon. Brad Hutto, Senate Minority Leader
Hon. Gary Simrill, House Majority Leader
Hon. J. Todd Rutherford, House Minority Leader

⁶ <https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/covid-19-planning-considerations-return-to-in-person-education-in-schools/>