

Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515-2201

May 31, 2023

Director John Shealey  
Oscar G. Johnson VA Medical Center  
325 East H Street  
Iron Mountain, MI 49801-4760

Director Shealey:

I write to share concerns I've heard from Upper Peninsula Veterans regarding the Iron Mountain VA Medical Center's masking mandate, and to implore you to relax these requirements in the wake of the recent guidance from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

VA has relaxed its universal masking mandates, only requiring masking in high-risk areas like chemotherapy and intensive care units, with discretion given to local leadership to force requirements in other areas. However, even as every county you service – and 99.69% of all counties in the US and every county East of the Mississippi River – falls under the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's "low" level of hospitalizations, Veterans continue to be forced to wear masks at Iron Mountain for even the most minor of visits.

The federal Public Health Emergency declaration for COVID-19 ended on May 11. This was recognition of the fact that the disease no longer poses the same threat to patients and communities that it did three years ago. Said another way, the era of extraordinary powers given to government officials in the name of public health is over.

I have heard from dozens of constituents sharing their frustrations with this policy – some of whom have chosen to delay or forego medical visits, or pay out of pocket to see another provider in the area without such restrictions. Strict masking requirements today are not rooted in scientific evidence, and their adherence now may be actively harming the health outcomes of our Veterans.

I therefore call upon you to expeditiously rescind Iron Mountain VA's strict masking requirements to ensure all Veterans feel comfortable to seek treatment.

I welcome any response you may have, and my staff and I are available to you at any time should you wish to directly discuss this matter.

Sincerely,



Jack Bergman  
Member of Congress

