

Chris Taggart

From: Stacey Umhey <sumhey@safeinthebitterroot.org>
Sent: Monday, August 3, 2020 12:33 PM
To: Chris Hoffman; Greg Chilcott; Jeff Burrows; Chris Taggart
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Community concerns

Dear Chris, Greg and Jeff:

Last week, I needed to stop by the County Admin building and transfer a title. I was a little taken aback that, despite the sign on the door asking me to wear a mask, I only saw one employee wearing a face covering. As I wandered the basement of the Admin building, I then peeked my head into the Extension office, and saw zero employees wearing a mask. I believe I counted 10 county employees that I came into contact with and only one wearing a mask. Every (non-employee) community member I saw who was in the building was wearing a mask and doing their part to keep our community healthy. I was a bit perplexed and thought I would drop you a note to politely register my concern and ask that, as County leaders, you try and do more to help people take this current health crisis a bit more seriously and encourage county employees to set a good example by wearing a mask at work.

That was Friday and before I got a chance to drop you a note, something happened that really changed my point of view. On Saturday, I took my 15-year-old daughter to her job at the grocery store. Throughout this health crisis, my daughter has maintained her employment at the grocery store, bagging your groceries and my groceries- serving our community and making sure folks can have the things they need-even during a major global health crisis when most folks were safely sheltering at home. On Saturday, her job was to clean the shopping carts, making sure that members of our community can rest assured that they can safely shop for groceries. She was in the midst of doing so when an elderly gentleman, who was wearing a mask, asked her if the carts had been cleaned. When she responded that they had been cleaned, the man PULLED DOWN HIS MASK, SPIT ON HIS HANDS and WIPED HIS HANDS ON THE SHOPPING CART before pushing the cart into the lot, at which point, my daughter had to go get the cart and clean it again. She texted me from work, incredibly upset that this is what she has to deal with. This, for me, is the largest and most recent example of the spiraling stupidity and meanness that is currently being demonstrated by members of this community. I've seen other examples of (grown) people chastising grocery store workers (also teenagers) for wearing a mask and the staff at SAFE's thrift store has also been verbally assaulted on a regular basis since your directive that wearing a mask is "voluntary," despite the Governor's directive to the contrary.

What does this have to do with you, you might be asking. Well, unfortunately, it seems to me that your leadership is creating the conditions for folks to divide rather than unite during this challenging time. You have sent the message that wearing a mask is voluntary and you seem to be quite comfortable with the fact that the Ravalli County Public Health system is disintegrating during the midst of a global health crisis. All of this is creating a dynamic in the community that is not only potentially unsafe, it's also incredibly divisive. In short, all of this is creating a dynamic where grown men feel empowered to bully children at the grocery store.

I'm asking you to reconsider your guidance about wearing a mask to prevent the spread of this disease. I'm asking you to find a solution to our Public Health staffing crisis so that we can have some medically educated leadership during this health crisis. This isn't a constitutional issue, it's a health crisis-one that is getting worse by the day right here in our community. I'm asking you to step up and provide some unifying leadership to a community that is fast becoming more and more divided and more at risk of a continued health crisis. I'm asking you to help make it safe for my daughter to continue to serve her community at the grocery store. I know that you're hearing a lot from a very vocal group of folks telling you to do the opposite of what I'm suggesting. I'm just hoping that you can also give some credence to those of us who simply wish to live in a healthy community. Thanks for thinking about this.

Stacey Umhey

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