



Alaska Chapter

American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™



Incorporated 1987

October 14, 2021

Michael B Savitt MD
Chief Medical Officer, Anchorage Health Department

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Executive Committee**

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Dr. Savitt,

As fellow pediatricians and health care workers, as well as American Academy of Pediatrics members, we would like to express our thanks for your op ed published on October 11th in the Anchorage Daily News urging the attacks on our medical colleagues to end. You eloquently described the challenges facing workers in Anchorage's hospitals and the strain on all of our families, friends, and neighbors. We wholeheartedly agree that we must "do our part to fight this common enemy: the COVID-19 pandemic."

The following night, you addressed the Anchorage Assembly at the behest of Ms. Allard. As members of the Alaska Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, we are compelled to address several comments that we fear may be misleading to the community:

- 1) When asked by member Allard to address rates of COVID-19 in Anchorage, you testified that "all of the numbers look good." By no standard public health definition is a rate of 115 cases per 100,000 residents per day a "good" number. The CDC defines >14 cases per 100,000 residents per day as their highest transmission risk (red). On October 13th, our city rate was in fact over 4 times the national case rate of 27 per 100,000 residents. ICU capacity in Anchorage is extraordinarily limited, and operating just below capacity due to the expanded staffing resulting from arrival of Federal Emergency Management Agency-supported contractors sent here for our state's current emergency. Our health system remains very much at risk.
- 2) You stated that there are "448 active cases in the Anchorage School District" as opposed to "our 181" and suggested that you are "not quite sure masks are helping where schools are concerned." Your insinuation that there are only 181 active cases of COVID-19 outside of the ASD is a grossly misleading comment at a time when there are an average of 339 new cases per day in Anchorage and each of these cases is "active" for at least 10 days. There are easily several THOUSAND active COVID-19 cases in Anchorage at this moment, and comparing a single day's INCIDENT cases to the ASD's well monitored ACTIVE case dashboard is incompetent at best and disinformative at worst. We sincerely hope that few of the children who you stated "were here complaining about" masks do not believe masks are ineffective or become compelled to disregard the guidance of our Academy and spread disinformation amongst their peers. In fact, we oppose the use of children as ammunition in either side of this debate. Our focus must always be protecting the health and safety of our children and the vulnerable in their families. One of every four COVID-19 related deaths results in the loss of a parent to a minor child. During the



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first year of the pandemic, over 140,000 children suffered from the death of a parent or custodial grandparent to COVID-19, of whom 65% were or racial or ethnic minorities, including Alaska Native/American Indian. Masking in schools is safe, effective, supported by the AAP, and most importantly, saves lives.

- 3) You stated that you were wearing a mask at the meeting as a courtesy to the Assembly and that you do not need a mandate to do so. Unfortunately, your courtesy is not widely shared in that room, and there are many in the community at large who have chosen to go unmasked in the absence of a mandate. As you well know from the masking literature, surgical masks or cloth face coverings are substantially more effective when ALL are wearing masks due to the source control provided to INFECTIOUS individuals. It is precisely this point that compelled the Assembly to take the action they did on the night you spoke; choosing to wear a mask is a courtesy to others, but does not fully protect the wearer.

Finally, we feel we must articulate our grave concerns about the objectivity of your testimony. You, in your official capacity as Chief Medical Officer of the Anchorage Health Department, provided the factually dubious statements summarized above at the behest of an assembly member, in essence testifying AGAINST one of the very public health interventions that you have previously stated you support; masks as a bridge to high rates of vaccination in the community. Our understanding, having listened to your testimony, is that you now DO NOT think that all Anchorage residents should be masking in public spaces, despite contrary guidance from the Chief Medical Officer for the State of Alaska and the CDC.

As your colleagues and peers, as well as concerned citizens of this city, we no longer feel that you demonstrate the ability to accurately and objectively advocate for the public welfare of the residents of this community. The actions of this administration suggest that either your advice has been contrary to public health best practices, or that your advice has gone totally unheeded. Either way, we ask that you consider whether your role is truly adding to the fight against our common enemy: the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sincerely,

AAP Alaska Chapter Member Physicians

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