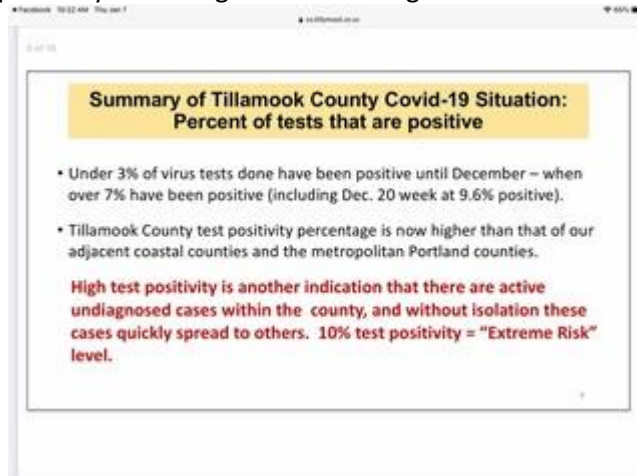


Hello all,

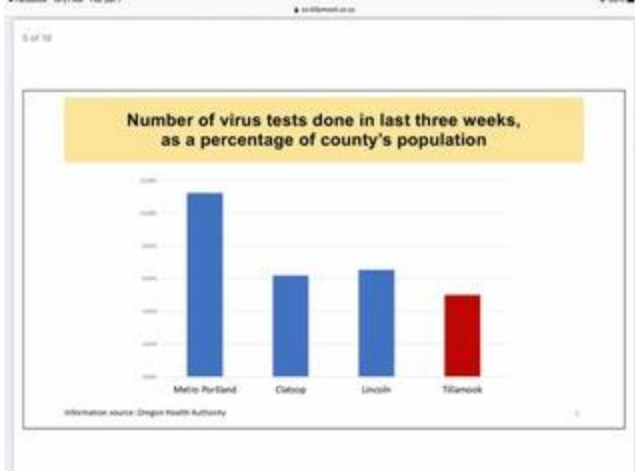
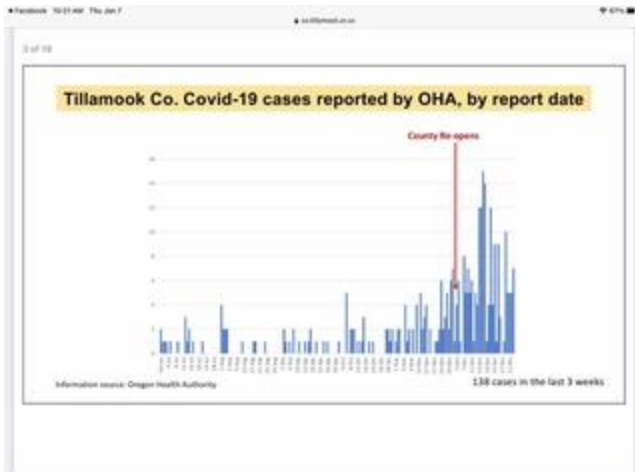
Thank you for accepting remote testimony and for helping to prevent the spread of COVID by doing so virtually. Surely, the irony is not lost on you that while we deem it unsafe to attend in-person testimony in the spacious halls of the legislature, (which is understandably closed) we are proposing to "open the flood gates" of COVID during the peak of this pandemic, allowing young children to return to in-person instruction.

1) Changing health metrics: I will start by saying that shifting numbers around on paper does not make any of us safer. *New "safety" metrics do not mean we have any less risk.* For example, I can change the definition of wealthy to include my income bracket, but by doing so, I will NOT have succeeded in making myself more wealthy. If it is unsafe for adults to testify before the legislature, if it is unsafe to eat in a restaurant, if it is unsafe for our school board members to hold in-person meetings, then how do we imagine that letting gaggles of children, many who cannot properly use the bathroom alone, who like to chew their nails or their pencils, to fidget with their masks, or who come from "anti-masking" families to be set loose into a school environment with some poor terrified teacher or staff person trying desperately to manage the chaos?

I live in rural Tillamook County where we are not testing as many people as some of the more urban areas. The data collected by the North Tillamook Public Health Information Group, made up by local folks knowledgeable and experienced in public health, shows that based on the small percentage we *have* tested, our positivity rate is high. The following are a few slides which were from a presentation made



last month.



We are in as much danger from COVID as ever, especially as new, more virulent strains are being discovered. We do not know just how effective vaccines will be against new strains. We do not know if people will still transmit the virus after vaccination. ***We do not even know if the promises of vaccines for all teachers, staff, substitutes, bus drivers, etc will be fulfilled before these employees are forced to return to a potentially life-threatening work environment.***

## 2) Kids will be kids:

I am a former teacher and have been a very regular volunteer in our local schools for many years. I am also a parent of 3 lovely children ages 13, 8 and 2. Their teachers have done a fantastic job engaging students through virtual learning, despite the hurdles. I will not be allowing my children to return to school until I know they will not get sick, or get *anyone else sick* with COVID. It is not worth the risk. I would not be able to live with myself if we made a careless decision and lost even ONE member of our own family or our school community because of it.

I know children well! In school life we always hope for things to go well, but even with a fully dedicated team working full days (and nights...) to provide signs, guidelines, arrows, tape, masks, etc it is NOT practical to assume that things will go according to plan. The plan itself is not realistic. Most teachers that I have spoken with assume that they will have to work in an unsafe and potentially deadly work environment. Kids wiggle off their chairs and need to get up and move. Kids touch their faces, sneeze, their masks come loose, and they need help zipping their jackets to go outside.

I have seen first hand that our kids are struggling due to lack of social interaction because of COVID. They have had to adjust to the new "normal" while staying home. I know that many people are struggling with childcare. I know that people are struggling economically, and having to balance staying home with work. We all know there are many problems hitting us from many angles, however it is unrealistic to expect that yet another shift in school schedules, teachers, routines and curriculum will be a success in the conditions we are facing, EVEN if everything goes according to plan.

## 3) The condition of our school buildings:

As anyone who has ever been into our local schools knows well, many of the schools are in disrepair and many are just housed in older buildings. I live in a district with a fairly old building housing our local Nehalem Elementary School. While the school is well taken care of, there is not an HVAC system in compliance with bare minimum standards needed to provide a safe environment during COVID pandemic. This is not ok. These kind of problems need to be analyzed and fixed before we consider sending anyone into the buildings.

## 4) Basic respect for workers:

***Not a single teacher or support staff should be forced to work in a life-threatening environment. Full stop.*** I know that the issue of legal liability has been worked out. Well that may save the pocketbook, but it should not ease our moral obligation to provide a safe workplace. Many teachers don't feel they have a choice. They need to provide for their families too. This is their life's work and they work untold hours to make a positive learning environment for our children. They should not have to choose between risking it all and putting food on the table. If this is deemed to be a safe work environment, I challenge every elected official (from school board members on up to Senators) to go supervise the unmasked lunch period. In my district, we have been told directly that some school board members would not be willing to go in-person to the schools right now, while those same people vote to send kids and teachers back. If it is safe enough for our babies and teachers, it certainly must be safe enough for elected officials.

## 5) Mental health/ healthcare for all:

Passing off mental health duties to teachers is SIMPLY wrong. While our teachers have filled many gaps not filled at home (or by our "civilized" society) over the years, one thing is clear: Oregon NEEDS to address the issue of healthcare for ALL, including mental health care for all. This problem predates

COVID. ***It is unrealistic and frankly outrageous to expect teachers to fill this role.*** When we have a significant portion of our population suffering long term from COVID due to lack of caution and strategic thinking in our re-opening policies, who will absorb those runaway healthcare costs?

#### 5) Death

***Not a single child should have to attend school in a life-threatening environment.*** It is our obligation to present a realistic picture to parents. Children can carry COVID home to their parents, family members, neighbors and even their grandparents (whose vaccines will be given to teachers to cover the slack in a poorly-executed vaccination emergency rush). None of this is necessary. How many deaths will it take before these senseless plans are reversed? We see the pattern playing out across the nation. We do not even know the full health consequences of these decisions. The long-term effects are a huge question mark and what we have seen is quite alarming.

#### 6 ) Real solutions

As people are struggling to pay rent and mortgages, keep their businesses open, struggling with depression, suicidal thoughts, domestic violence, food insecurity, and medical bills, WE MUST ACT, but we must not act hastily. The solutions to these problems will have to involve massive-scale economic relief and an investment in our communities, so that people can stay home if they need to or find the support needed. We will need a massive infrastructure building investment in mental health services which are woefully inadequate for the needs of our state, both pre-pandemic and now. It is not an easy task but it is the task before us.

Please fight to keep everyone safe until we have achieved herd immunity. We cannot allow schools to open for in-person learning at this time. Our futures and children's futures are in the balance. Thank you for your time.

Annie Naranjo-Rivera, mother