

Testimony presented to the Legislature's Joint Committee on Education by Merrie Najimy, President of the Massachusetts Teachers Association, on January 4, 2022:

Greetings. My name is Merrie Najimy. I am the president of the 115,000-member Massachusetts Teachers Association. I want to thank Senator Rausch for her leadership on this bill.

It's quite timely that I am here to speak in support of S. 2516, a bill related to protective face masks in educational settings. Governor Baker and Commissioner Riley this week set off yet another wave of chaos because of their incompetence, their inability to plan in advance, and their utter disdain for education unions. This has prevented them from working effectively with educators in a public health crisis.

That is why it is of *utmost urgency* that you report out favorably Senator Rausch's bill – right away.

The strategies outlined in this legislation are exactly what is needed to keep school communities safe and open for in-person learning. They are similar to the remedies that the MTA Board of Directors has overwhelmingly endorsed – twice in the past year.

The daily increase in COVID-19 infections is alarming and has reached a level that we have not seen before. Many public schools in Massachusetts are on the verge of closing due to issues relating to staff shortages. Effective masking is a critical mitigation strategy to protect students and educators from illness and infection.

To that point, we have significant concerns about the face masks that were just given out by DESE. There are two kinds of masks manufactured by Fujian that are under scrutiny. One is of medical grade, with certified efficacy. The other is marked "non-medical," and its efficacy appears to be substandard.

Incorrect statements are being made by Governor Baker and Commissioner Riley and their spokespersons. They are either deliberate lies or the product of incompetence and malfeasance. And they don't answer a simple question: Were the non-medical-grade masks that were distributed to school employees tested? It is becoming increasingly clear that they were not, and that they don't meet the KN95 standard.

Either Governor Baker and Commissioner Riley didn't know that MIT had tested a different type of mask from the same manufacturer and they unwittingly pronounced them as having passed a rigorous test by MIT, in which case they are incompetent, or they knowingly distributed inadequate masks while claiming they had been tested by MIT – in which case they lied to the public, superintendents, and school personnel.

This ongoing confusion endangers the health of students, families, and our greater school communities. If it continues, it will decrease the possibility of continuing the in-person

learning that we all want to see take place. We implore you, as legislators, to step in, investigate, and create an oversight mechanism.

I urge you to favorably report out S. 2516. Because the Baker Administration and DESE have made it clear they are unreliable and incompetent, we are looking to all of you to step in and lead.