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**Subject:** My comments for tonights meeting.

My name is Jay Johnson. I have lived full time in Empire Township since 2005. I have been a summer resident of Glen Arbor Township since 1966.

I speak today in strong support of the Benzie-Leelanau Health Department's recent order requiring masks in all our schools.

First, I would like to point out that our health department has achieved the highest Covid-19 vaccination rate in the entire state, with more than 80% of our citizens having received their first vaccination and 71% having received their second vaccination. This is a credit to the health department professionals and volunteers who managed the vaccination program. It is also a credit to the many County residents who followed the health department's recommendations. However, this pandemic is far from over. According to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, 7 Leelanau County residents developed Covid-19 infections on Monday, September 7, 2021, and 2 more Leelanau County residents developed Covid-19 infections just yesterday and our County is at the highest transmission level and is rated by the national Center for Disease Control as at substantial risk from Covid-19.

While it cannot yet be confirmed, this high number of cases is most likely due to the Delta variant of Covid-19 which has prompted our health department to order all schools throughout its service area to require masks for all students, faculty, and staff, even if they have been vaccinated. According to yesterday's *Washington Post*, "*data collected by the American Academy of Pediatrics show new cases among children and teenagers have reached the highest weekly level since the pandemic's start, at more than 250,000 for the week ending September 2 – more than a fourth of all new cases that week in the U.S.*" Again, according to the *Post's* Covid tracker, 2,400 children were hospitalized with Covid-19 in the previous week, the most yet in the outbreak. Unfortunately, this level of transmission also puts school faculty and staff at higher risk. The *Post* article reports that, 13 employees of the Miami-Dade County, Florida, public schools have died since mid-August and one suburban school district outside Waco, Texas, defied the state governor's orders, and mandated masks after two middle school teachers died from Covid-19.

While I appreciate the efforts of the Leelanau County Board of Commissioners to fund our bi-county health department, I believe more funding for the health department is required. That money is readily available to the commission from federal funds already appropriated in response to the pandemic. One final point, while I realize that mandatory mask requirements have been politically controversial, I do not want our local politicians, who are not trained in medicine, to substitute their political judgment for the expertise of the professional staff at the Benzie-Leelanau Health Department.