

Dear Commissioners:

I am writing about a resolution relating to the "Great Barrington Declaration" that Commissioner Bunek is reportedly planning to propose. I strongly urge you not to approve this proposal or anything like it.

It is inconceivable that such a statement by this Board would be a wise or helpful public health message to send to our county residents or to a wider audience. We are still in the grip of a public health crisis; cases and deaths in this County continue to grow as they do statewide and nationally. The suggestions contained in the 'Declaration' contradict what the overwhelming majority of health professionals locally, in our state, and nationally urge us to do. The underlying goal of opening everything up and accelerating us to herd immunity has been largely debunked over the past 9 months for a number of reasons. Perhaps the most important is that hundreds of thousands more Americans would have to needlessly die or spend a lifetime dealing with the effects of the virus.

The legitimacy of the 'Declaration' must be questioned because of where and how it originated. The three physicians who drafted the 'Declaration' did so under the auspices of the American Institute for Economic Research (AIER), located in Great Barrington, MA. The Mission Statement of AIER begins "AIER educates Americans on the value of personal freedom, free enterprise, property rights, limited government and sound money." AIER is not the type of institution that is devoted to researching or advancing knowledge about public health policy and best practices. First and foremost it is a Think Tank focused on the economy and free enterprise. It is also an organization that mirrors the views of Republicans and Libertarians who value personal freedom and the economy over the health and lives of our citizens, and who have been attacking and resisting the approach of our governor in dealing with the virus.

Frankly, Commissioner Bunek's purpose for and language in the proposal also must be questioned. Just because he does not want to wear a mask or follow other scientifically established recommendations, why encourage others to ignore these precautions and to openly defy the governor's mandates? He mentions the concern about how Covid and the resulting restrictions on our lives have impacted mental health issues. But it is simply naive to think that the tremendous surge to come if we reopened now would not dwarf the cases, deaths, and yes, mental health issues we have been experiencing. Our citizens are finally being vaccinated; continuing the practices of mask wearing, social distancing, and not congregating in groups (indoor or out) will accelerate the goal of controlling the virus and allowing things to fully reopen.

And why does Commissioner Bunek call this the Wuhan virus? This County recently was confronted with overt racism and some have attempted to begin discussing the nature of racism here and what can be done. While he clearly has not been supportive of this effort, did he not learn anything? Perhaps the real purpose of Commissioner Bunek's proposal is simply to add to the ongoing campaign of undermining state and national guidelines and mandates based on sound public health policies and science. This Board should not give its approval to this misguided and offensive resolution.

Thank you.

Peter Raphael
Maple City