

Sen. Larson: GOP to Wisconsin neighbors: “Let them eat COVID”

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Madison, WI - In voting today to repeal the lone COVID mitigation measure they haven't yet defeated in a partisan Supreme Court, the statewide mask mandate, Wisconsin Republicans have sent a message loud and clear to the people of Wisconsin: “Let them eat COVID.”

After doing less than nothing to help Wisconsinites affected by the pandemic in over 9 months, today Senate Republicans advanced the repeal of a science-based, common-sense public health measure that has saved countless lives.

According to research published in the [New York Times](#) on January 24th, ending existing public health restrictions now would lead to 29 million additional COVID-19 infections in the United States by July. If we extrapolate that to Wisconsin's share of the U.S. population, that means over 514,000 more coronavirus cases, even with vaccinations continuing as they are. Given our state's 1.1% death rate, that means over 5,600 additional deaths. That's right, by repealing the mask mandate, Wisconsin could nearly double its total COVID-19 deaths in just 5 more months. With new, vastly more contagious variants of this virus making their way across the globe, these numbers could well end up being an underestimate.

Masks don't just save lives, they protect our economy as well. Consumers feel safer shopping in places where masks are worn, with many refusing to shop anywhere else. If infections spike once again to levels similar to what we saw late last year, many businesses might be forced to close – this time for good. My Republican colleagues say they want all students to have in-person school as soon as possible. This simply can't happen safely without mandatory face coverings.

As reckless and irresponsible as their previous lawsuits and inaction have been, today's vote by the Republican-controlled State Senate may end up being their most egregious dereliction of duty. Much like Marie Antoinette in the 18th century, they may not have actually said "let them eat COVID," but their actions show that they are equally out of touch with the suffering of their constituents as those aristocrats in France all those years ago.

Those who continue to suffer and end up losing their loved ones to this disease should never forget what was done here today.