



New York State
**PUBLIC EMPLOYEES
FEDERATION AFL-CIO**

1168-70 Troy-Schenectady Road
P.O. Box 12414
Albany, NY 12212-2414

(518) 785-1900
(800) 342-4306
Fax (518) 785-1814

OFFICERS:

Wayne Spence
President

Joseph F. Donahue III
Secretary-Treasurer

Sharon V. DeSilva
Randi L. DiAntonio
Darlene Williams
Vice Presidents

**REGIONAL
COORDINATORS:**

Michele Silsby
Region 1

Andrew Puleo
Region 2

Leisa Abraham
Region 3

Gina M. Corona
Region 4

David Dubofsky
Region 5

Christopher Dunham
Region 6

Barbara Stransky
Region 7

Danielle Bridger
Region 8

Diane Jaulus
Region 9

Radhakrishna Mohan
Region 10

Bernadette O'Connor
Region 11

Nora Higgins
Region 12

TRUSTEES:

Christopher Buman
Bruce C. Giddings
Muriel Hardy-Lee

December 14, 2021

The Honorable Kathy Hochul
Governor of New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, N.Y. 12224

Dear Governor Hochul,

I thank you for your swift action in response to the concerning increases in COVID positivity rates over the past few weeks and your implementation of a mandatory masking order. As you know, our members have long been at increased risk for exposure due to their high level of public contact and their work in congregate settings, and the new mandate is an important part of implementing strong COVID controls and protections for workers.

However, while masking is an important piece of a suite of COVID controls, it is only one piece. As you point out, the highly contagious Omicron variant will cause the virus to spread exponentially, putting many more people at risk for infection and disease. The statewide average COVID positivity rate has doubled over the past month to 4.6%, a full 4% higher than the low of 0.4% in June 2021. Some areas are as high as 7-10%. Hospitals are overwhelmed again and many are cutting back on elective procedures in accordance with your executive Order. Why then is New York State continuing to ask state workers to increase their in-person time to 50% or more, with some places at 100%?

You state that the mask mandate is a "key part of our broader strategy for slowing the spread of the virus, reopening our economy safely, and protecting vulnerable members of our population." Lower workplace density via telecommuting must also be a part of that strategy. As we have seen, even the fully vaccinated are susceptible to the Delta and now the Omicron variants. Even if the vaccines perform as hoped to lessen the severity and risk of hospitalization and death, fully vaccinated individuals are still part of the transmission chain, putting other vulnerable people at risk.

PEF members are afraid to return to work in a high-density atmosphere that puts them, their families, and their commutes at risk for transmission of this deadly virus, especially at a time when the positivity rates are increasing. Lower density along with other COVID controls (enhanced ventilation, vaccination, hand hygiene, social distancing, and cleaning/disinfection protocols) are proven ways to slow the spread of the virus. I ask that you have New York State agencies reverse course and allow increased telecommuting to the fullest extent possible. In this way we can better protect workers and the populations they serve.

Sincerely,

Wayne Spence, President, NYS Public Employees Federation