

## NEWS RELEASE

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### United Faculty of Florida (UFF) Demands Safe Working and Learning Conditions for All of Florida's College and University Students, Faculty, and Staff

"We call on Governor Ron DeSantis to require universal indoor masking and to approve other common-sense health and safety measures or to step aside and allow local leaders to make the right call and protect the people of Florida. Our state's higher education classrooms must be safe and healthy learning environments this fall; no other considerations, political or otherwise, should come into the equation."

--UFF President Andrew Gothard

On behalf of the 28,000 higher education faculty and professionals the United Faculty of Florida represents in the Florida State University System and the Florida College System, we wrote to Governor DeSantis to ask that all public higher education campuses in Florida follow CDC recommendations, including universal masking indoors, to limit severe illness and keep our colleges and universities open for learning.

The health and safety of Florida's students, faculty, and communities are vital to our state's future. We believe in listening to experts, and we support state policy that benefits all Floridians, regardless of which political party is in power. We support reasonable responses to dangerous conditions, and we applaud the efforts of legislators, administrators, and citizens who have taken appropriate measures in responding to the rising threat of the COVID-19 Delta variant. However, with the start of Fall classes rapidly approaching, worsening pandemic conditions around the state show that current precautions for higher education students, faculty, and staff are not enough.

We urge the Governor as well as state education leaders and legislators to follow the guidance of the CDC before more of Florida's students, faculty, staff, family members, and other loved ones are killed by this virus. As such, we strongly support the following measures:

1. Effective immediately, all higher ed campuses in Florida must follow CDC recommendations, including masking indoors.
2. All higher ed students and faculty should be vaccinated, and higher ed campuses must support and facilitate vaccination drives as quickly as possible to avoid virus outbreaks in dorms, cafeterias, and other high traffic campus areas.
3. All of Florida's higher ed campuses must provide sufficient remote/online teaching and learning opportunities to faculty and students who need them.

In the past few weeks, Florida has become the epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic, with positivity rates and hospitalizations approaching—and in some instances exceeding—those from the height of the pandemic in Spring 2020. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that even vaccinated people should return to wearing masks in public indoor spaces in areas with substantial or high COVID transmission—a recommendation

**The Higher Education Affiliate of Florida Education Association, National Education Association, American Federation of Teachers, and AFL-CIO**

that includes higher education campuses. These new developments have made the members of UFF deeply concerned about the safety of Florida's college and university classrooms this Fall semester, especially now that Governor DeSantis, the Board and Governors, and the Board of Education have taken virtually no action to protect the lives and welfare of this state's higher ed students, faculty, and staff, and, in some instances, have even stood in the way of reasonable safety precautions.

The health and safety of the people of Florida is the most important concern right now, as all Floridians confront this next crisis in the COVID pandemic. We strongly encourage Florida's policy makers to do the right thing by keeping Florida's students, faculty, staff, and communities safe in the classroom and beyond.

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