

Medical Boards Hunting Down Doctors Over Mask Mandates

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Dr. Jeremy Henrichs, a member of the Mahomet-Seymour school board and a physician for the University of Illinois Athletic Department, was targeted by state investigators due to his opposition to mandatory masks
- › Henrichs' support of optional masking led to a complaint being filed, at which point the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation (IDFPR) opened an investigation to do their "due diligence"
- › An email from a medical investigator asked Henrichs for a "detailed statement on your opinion about masks, and whether you support and will enforce a mask mandate based on your elected position as a school board member"
- › An attorney for Henrichs questioned whether the investigation had legal standing and suggested it was an attempt to "coerce or intimidate a public official in the performance of his public duties"
- › The IDFPR investigation has since been called a "frightening abuse of power" by state Sen. Chapin Rose, R-Mahomet, who filed a complaint in response and asked the Office of the Executive Inspector General to investigate the case
- › After backlash, the agency issued a letter of apology to Henrichs, backpedaling on their inquiry

Dr. Jeremy Henrichs, a member of the Mahomet-Seymour school board and a physician for the University of Illinois Athletic Department, was targeted by state investigators

who said they had opened an official investigation due to his opposition to mandatory masks in classrooms.¹

The chilling governmental overreach is just the latest example of state and federal governments attempting to intimidate and silence those who question mask mandates and other official COVID-19 responses. Henrichs had previously voted in favor of a plan that would make mask usage optional unless infection rates rose quickly – at which point mandatory masks would be reimposed.

However, due to updated CDC guidelines recommending masks for all students, the state enacted a statewide school mask mandate requiring masks for all students in class. Henrichs' support of optional masking led to a complaint being filed, at which point the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation (IDFPR) opened an investigation to do their "due diligence."²

State Uses Coercion and Intimidation Tactics

August 11, 2021, Henrichs received an email from a medical investigator asking for a "detailed statement on your opinion about masks, and whether you support and will enforce a mask mandate based on your elected position as a school board member."³ "This would fall under the unprofessional-conduct part of the Medical Practice Act," the email added.⁴

It's unclear at what point during the pandemic having an opinion contrary to the "official" rhetoric became reason for investigation, but we're well past that point now. An attorney for Henrichs responded, questioning whether the investigation had legal standing and suggesting it was an attempt to "coerce or intimidate a public official in the performance of his public duties."

State law prohibits the intimidation of public officials going about their official duties, but IDFPR investigators said they are required to investigate every complaint about a medical professional. Why Henrichs' opinions on masks are open for investigation is another issue entirely.

In an email, a state investigator stated, “What the medical disciplinary board wants to know is if the doctor will support and enforce the mask mandate by the governor.” An IDFPR spokesperson also stated in an email, as reported by WCIA news:⁵

“IDFPR takes all allegations against licensees seriously. Complaints filed with the Department, as well as investigations undertaken by the Department, are confidential, unless and until a public complaint or discipline is issued by the Department. If the Department determines a physician violated the Medical Practice Act, an appropriate course of action will be taken.”

Targeted for Questioning Mandatory Masking

The IDFPR investigation has since been called a “frightening abuse of power” by Sen. Chapin Rose, R-Mahomet, who filed a complaint in response and asked the Office of the Executive Inspector General to investigate the case.⁶ In a statement, Henrichs called the overreach a direct threat:⁷

“I have considered authoritative medical evidence that questions the necessity of mandatory masking in our schools. As a result, the IDFPR has threatened my medical licensure unless I expressly support and enforce a mask mandate for all students. The IDFPR has commanded me to ‘toe the line’ or suffer personal and professional consequences.

The IDFPR's actions constitute a direct threat from the state to the well-being of my family and all board members to freely and independently exercise the duties of elected office.”

Other regulatory bodies have issued similar threats and warnings attempting to silence physicians. The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario (CPSO), which regulates the practice of medicine in Ontario, is among them. In April 2021, it issued a statement prohibiting physicians from making comments or providing advice that goes against the official narrative.

According to CPSO, physicians, in isolated incidents, have been spreading blatant “misinformation” via social media, which is undermining “public health measures meant to protect all of us.” In response, they released their “Statement on Public Health Misinformation” on April 30, 2021, which reads:⁸

“The College is aware and concerned about the increase of misinformation circulating on social media and other platforms regarding physicians who are publicly contradicting public health orders and recommendations.

Physicians hold a unique position of trust with the public and have a professional responsibility to not communicate anti-vaccine, anti-masking, anti-distancing and anti-lockdown statements and/or promoting unsupported, unproven treatments for COVID-19.

Physicians must not make comments or provide advice that encourages the public to act contrary to public health orders and recommendations. Physicians who put the public at risk may face an investigation by the CPSO and disciplinary action, when warranted.

When offering opinions, physicians must be guided by the law, regulatory standards, and the code of ethics and professional conduct. The information shared must not be misleading or deceptive and must be supported by available evidence and science.”

While threatening physicians with investigation and disciplinary action should they speak out regarding the many inconsistencies and questions surrounding pandemic lockdowns, masks and COVID-19 vaccines, CPSO had the gall to add that it’s not intending to stifle healthy public debate about how to “best address aspects of the pandemic.” “Rather, our focus is on addressing those arguments that reject scientific evidence and seek to rouse emotions over reason,” it added.⁹

IDFPR Issues Apology to Henrichs

After backlash, including Rose's call for an investigation into IDFPR's actions, the agency issued a letter of apology to Henrichs, backpedaling on their inquiry. In an email to Henrichs' attorney, Dina Torrisi Martin, general counsel for IDFPR, stated:¹⁰

"The initial response to your inquiry requested information that the Department does not need. Please disregard the questions posed in the emails of August 11 and 17, 2021. On behalf of the Department, I sincerely apologize for the tone and content of those communications.

I would like to provide context for the Department's approach to complaints. Pursuant to its duties under the Medical Practice Act, 225 ILCS 60, for years, the Department has generally maintained a practice of opening an investigation of every complaint it receives relating to individuals licensed by the Department.

As you can understand, not every complaint requires a detailed investigation or action; however, that determination cannot be made at the time of the initial filing."

Mario Treto Jr., IDFPR's secretary, also stated that a preliminary review of the complaint has concluded with the strong recommendation that the complaint be closed. In a statement, Henrichs said he appreciated the apology, but "until this complaint has, in fact, formally been dismissed," he has "nothing further to say at this time."¹¹

State Boards Threaten Licenses, Don't Define 'Misinformation'

A spokeswoman for Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker, Jordan Abudayyeh, stated, "The Pritzker administration has not and will not seek disciplinary action against the professional licenses of individuals who disagree with the mask mandate."¹² Yet, according to a statement released by the Federation of State Medical Boards (FSMB), they absolutely could.

In a news release titled, "Spreading COVID-19 Misinformation May Put Medical License at Risk," FSMB stated that the "dramatic increase in the dissemination of COVID-19

vaccine 'misinformation' and 'disinformation' by physicians and other health care professionals on social media platforms, online and in the media” led to the release of their latest threat, which they called a “statement”:^{13,14}

“Physicians who generate and spread COVID-19 vaccine misinformation or disinformation are risking disciplinary action by state medical boards, including the suspension or revocation of their medical license.

Due to their specialized knowledge and training, licensed physicians possess a high degree of public trust and therefore have a powerful platform in society, whether they recognize it or not.

They also have an ethical and professional responsibility to practice medicine in the best interests of their patients and must share information that is factual, scientifically grounded and consensus-driven for the betterment of public health.

Spreading inaccurate COVID-19 vaccine information contradicts that responsibility, threatens to further erode public trust in the medical profession and puts all patients at risk.”

Markedly absent from the statement is a definition of what constitutes “misinformation,” leaving the word wide open for interpretation. It’s not only physicians that are being hunted down but also academics.

Virtually anyone who speaks out about data that go against the official COVID propaganda can be labeled a dangerous “agent of misinformation,” which is what happened to Harvard epidemiologist Martin Kulldorff, who wrote a paper against lockdowns but couldn’t get it published.

Kulldorff and colleagues soon banded together to write the Great Barrington Declaration,¹⁵ which calls for “focused protection” of the elderly and those in nursing homes and hospitals, while allowing businesses and schools to remain open. Soon after, they too were attacked and accused of spreading misinformation and being “COVID deniers.”¹⁶

Professor Mark Crispin Miller, who has taught classes on mass persuasion and propaganda at the New York University Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development for the last two decades, is another example. After challenging students to investigate current propaganda narratives surrounding mask mandates, Miller was placed under conduct review for spreading “dangerous misinformation.”

Miller fought back, suing 19 of his department colleagues for libel after they signed a letter to the school dean demanding a review of Miller’s conduct.¹⁷ Miller also launched a petition to New York University in support of academic freedom, free speech and free inquiry, without which he states, “‘education’ ... will be mere training for compliance, stunting students’ minds instead of opening them – a practice fatal to democracy, and, finally, to humanity itself.”¹⁸

Are State Boards Maintaining Hit Lists?

Jumping on the libel bandwagon, MedPage Today conducted an investigation into 20 physicians it says are spreading “COVID-19 misinformation,” including me, noting that “not one of 20 physicians who’ve peddled such falsehoods has been disciplined by their state licensing agency for doing so.”¹⁹

MedPage Today contacted 10 states that license physicians, apparently to ask them why they haven’t disciplined physicians for spreading undefined “misinformation.” In Illinois, IDFPR stated that if the agency “determines a licensee committed violations against the Act that regulates their profession, an appropriate course of action will be taken.

Complaints filed with and investigations undertaken by IDFPR are confidential, unless and until a public complaint or discipline is issued by the Department.”²⁰

From MedPage Today’s investigation, it seems that states have put together lists of the people they’re targeting to delicense, but none has taken action against the physicians they’re accusing of spreading unidentified “bad info.” Perhaps that’s because sharing information isn’t a crime, but stifling it – and engaging in unfounded threats and intimidation – is.

Sources and References

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