

Lafayette City Council members plan to introduce local mask-wearing mandate

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The Lafayette City Council is drafting an ordinance that would require employees and customers of businesses to wear masks.

It's the second time the council is attempting such a mandate, having backed off an attempt in July at the request of Mayor-President Josh Guillory. At the time, Guillory said the governor's mandate was sufficient. Then he ordered the city's fire and police departments not to enforce the state mandate.

"We are still under the governor's mandate," Councilperson Nanette Cook, a co-sponsor of the ordinance, said Wednesday. "We're just trying to get what's already in place enforced."

Cook and Councilman Glenn Lazard, who supported a mask mandate in July, are sponsoring the latest ordinance, which is still being drafted and will be introduced as an emergency ordinance, Lazard said Wednesday.

"I'm confident we're going to have the votes to pass it," he added.

Favorable votes from three out of five council members are needed to approve the ordinance. Four of the five would be needed to override a veto by Guillory.

His communications director, Jamie Angelle, asked Wednesday afternoon whether Guillory plans to veto such an ordinance, said he would have to speak with the mayor-president.

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Guillory, in July, said he would not infringe on the public's liberties by requiring them to wear a mask or other face covering to slow the spread of COVID-19.

As of Wednesday, the Louisiana Department of Health reported 216 deaths in Lafayette Parish caused by COVID-19 and 20,287 positive cases, up 193 since Tuesday. The first case in the parish was reported in March.

Lazard said if the council approves the ordinance, he expects Guillory to instruct the Lafayette Fire and Police Departments to enforce the mask mandate because it will be a local law. Guillory has said enforcement of the state mandate is the job of the State Fire Marshal's Office.

"Obviously we have no control over what the mayor chooses to do or not to do," Lazard said. "But I fully expect that he will follow the law. I expect he will not do anything as far as ordering agencies to not enforce it as he has done with the governor's mandates."

Lazard, who was under treatment for cancer for several months last year, said he was frustrated to learn Guillory instructed local officials not to enforce the governor's mask mandate. Then seeing the high number of deaths from COVID-19 and reading about a Lafayette funeral home not enforcing the mask mandate after being asked to do so by a family that lost a loved one to the virus prompted him to act.

Cook said she and Lazard received complaints from constituents about the city not enforcing the governor's mask order. Studies show that communities that enforce mask mandates have fewer coronavirus cases, she said.

"I believe as a council we have a duty to protect our people," Cook added.