The spread of COVID-19 has affected all Ohioans. Our front-line workers, including health care professionals and first responders, and all those who went to work in uncertain times deserve our great thanks and respect. They and their families also deserve each of us doing all we can to limit the spread of the virus, which recent metrics show has yet to be contained. One action that each Ohioan can take is to wear a face covering whenever he or she is in public. Both research and experience show that face coverings limit the spread of the virus. Wearing a face covering is easy to do, a common courtesy to your fellow Ohioans, and clearly demonstrates our determination to battle back against this silent enemy.

Yes, we understand that most people don’t enjoy wearing a mask, but it’s a small inconvenience when you consider that stopping the spread of the virus could literally save lives. And this simple action is one that can help ensure that more of the businesses in Ohio will be able to reopen and return to more normal operations. The Governor’s Economic Advisory Board asks that you put on a mask whenever you are in public. Together, our collective efforts can save the lives and livelihoods of Ohioans.

A little history will help put this recommendation into context. In mid-March, Gov. Mike DeWine quickly identified that the COVID-19 pandemic could have a significantly negative effect on the people and businesses in Ohio. By the end of the month, nearly every state in the U.S. imposed some form of economic shutdown or stay-at-home order as a means to battle the pandemic. These actions were necessary to ensure public health and contain COVID-19, but they also had significant economic consequences. So, the governor formed an Economic Advisory Board, a diverse group comprising 18 Ohio business leaders from large corporations, small businesses, and woman- and minority-owned enterprises. Collectively the Board represents a broad swath of business activity and geographic presence across our state.

Our Advisory Board was charged with developing protocols for safe operation during the pandemic for different businesses, and with making recommendations for a responsible, phased reopening of Ohio’s economy. Throughout this effort, we sought to balance a return to economic activity with the paramount goal of protecting the public’s health.

Based upon consultations with businesses, medical experts, public health agencies, and others, and upon the experience of the essential businesses that continued to operate during the shutdown orders, we developed a set of best-practice protocols to promote
safe workplaces. Our number one recommendation was to mandate the wearing of face coverings in all workplaces and public spaces.

We came to this conclusion based on input from medical experts, who explained that face coverings can protect others from those who unknowingly are carrying the disease. We also observed that large manufacturing plants overseas – facilities containing as many as 2,000 to 3,000 employees in relatively tight spaces – where masks were mandatory had had no incidents of workplace-driven COVID-19 infections for weeks on end.

Enforcing the wearing of masks is relatively easy for business leaders who can mandate safe operating protocols on top of what might already be required in different workplaces by various state and federal regulatory agencies. However, it became clear that this issue would be far more contentious and controversial among the general population. Based upon feedback that he received, the governor, responsible to serve all Ohioans, made the decision to make the wearing of masks a “recommended” best practice rather than a “mandate” for the general public.

All 18 members of the Economic Advisory Board believed months ago that face coverings can be an effective means of minimizing the spread of COVID-19. And we still believe that today. They provide extra protection for our employees and our customers. We also believe they build consumer confidence by allowing more people to feel safe to return to public places and patronize Ohio businesses. We feel it is important to go on record unanimously in support of having all Ohioans wear face coverings in all workplace settings and all public spaces when exposed to other people.

Face coverings can help save lives, and we believe they can protect Ohio’s economy, too.

The Governor’s Economic Advisory Board

Frank Sullivan, chairman and CEO, RPM International Inc. (chair)
Patrick Bowe, president and CEO, The Andersons, Inc.
Mike Brooks, chairman, Rocky Boots
Brian Burgett, president, Kokosing Construction Company
Toby Cosgrove, executive advisor, Cleveland Clinic
Sam Covelli, CEO, Covelli Enterprises
Paul Dolan, owner, Cleveland Indians
Jacqueline Gamblin, founder and CEO, JYG Innovations
Mike Hennigan, president and CEO, Marathon Petroleum Corporation
Steven Johnston, president and CEO, Cincinnati Financial Corporation
Loretta Mester, president and CEO, Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland
Cameron Mitchell, founder and CEO, Cameron Mitchell Restaurants
Kelly Moore, owner, GKM Auto Parts
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Vanessa Whiting, president, A.E.S. Management Group