

## *Public relations agency prioritizes return to work over employee health*

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Good riddance. Now I don't have to wear a mask at work!



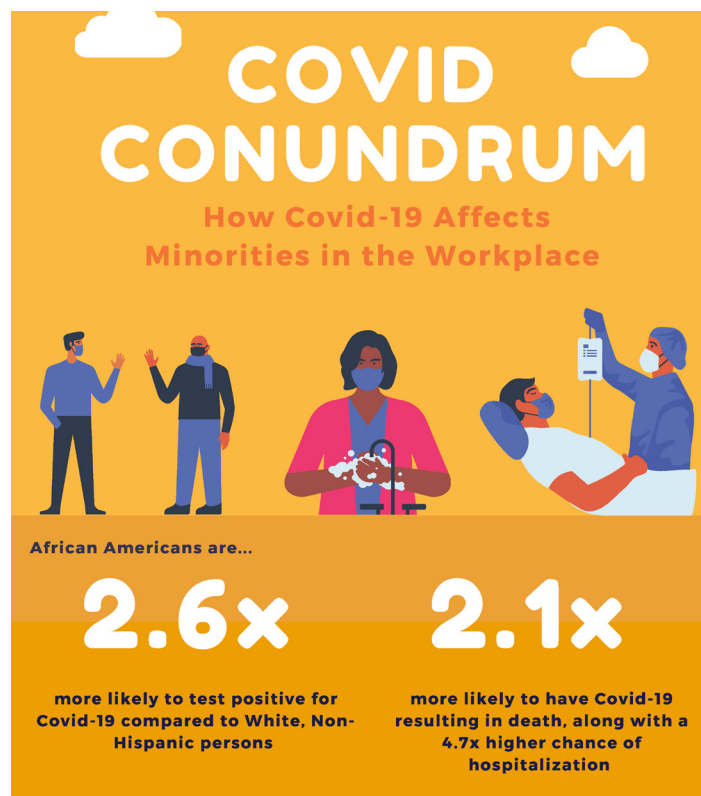
Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the health of the public and employees should be the main concern. However, the actions of companies have shown otherwise, with many deciding to prioritize reopening their businesses first.

The PR agency in question has given its employees no other option than to return to work face-to-face. This agency is known for being led and staffed by young people, seemingly at a lesser risk for the virus. It has failed to consider that COVID-19 disproportionately impacts minorities. In the United States Black people makeup

12.5% of the population but 18.7% of the deaths while Hispanics are 18.5% of the population but

24.2% of the deaths. Returning to work puts these communities at greater risk, ignoring the discomfort that individuals may feel about returning in the midst of a pandemic. Other populations threatened are older employees and those with pre-existing conditions. These employees will have trouble returning to work and forcing them back puts them in the uncomfortable position of having to prioritize income over health.

An anonymous



whistleblower, working as an intern for the agency, has shared that the company's shift in policy has created a change in attitude toward following safety regulations. One intern, a Black woman with severe asthma, is considering quitting her position over concerns for her health. Another coworker texted our source "Good riddance. Now I don't have to wear a mask at work!" The opinions of other employees on not following CDC guidelines are now coming forward, furthering the spread of the virus. Speaking out at work can be intimidating enough without the added pressure of having to worry about lost opportunities, income and health threats.

The PRSA Ethics Code includes advocacy and fairness to guide members in their work. This agency is clearly violating this code, by not creating a safe space for debate and not respecting the opinions of all employees. Advocacy should include not only external publics, but the internal. In regards to fairness the code also says,

"We respect all opinions and support the right of free expression." This agency seems to only respect the free expression of self proclaimed anti-maskers who disagree with the CDC. More respect is warranted for those scared for their lives in the middle of a pandemic.

The author of this insensitive text should be fired immediately, and further investigation into the leadership and staff of the agency should follow. There is no room for such carelessness in today's workplace, which should instead foster the equitable growth of all of its employees. The agency must allow their employees options in these trying times. This must include an option for those who choose to continue to work remotely, without further explanation. A hybrid work option can and should be instituted to accommodate all groups. If employees do return to work, masks must be mandated to ensure their safety. This agency's actions are inexcusable, and we must not accept this as the norm in the 2020 workplace and onward.

