

Florida withholds funds to schools defying governor's ban on mask mandates

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Tallahassee, August 31 (RHC)-- The U.S. COVID-19 outlook continues to worsen, with hospitalizations rising and deaths averaging more than 1,300 per day. On Monday, the Biden administration announced a civil rights probe into five states that have banned local officials from mandating masks. The Education Department's Office for Civil Rights argues those states are endangering students with disabilities who are at greater risk of COVID-19 by denying them equal access to safe in-person instruction.

In Florida, right-wing Republican Governor Ron DeSantis has made good on his threat to punish local school boards that mandate masks in schools. On Monday, Florida's education commissioner said the state was withholding funds in Alachua and Broward counties equal to the monthly salaries of school board officials there. That's despite a court ruling Friday by a Florida judge who ruled DeSantis overstepped his authority by banning mask mandates.

Florida is in the grips of one of the world's worst COVID-19 surges, averaging more than 16,000 hospitalizations and 260 deaths per day. The Central Florida Disaster Medical Coalition recently shipped 14 portable morgues to area hospitals to handle an overflow of bodies.

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