

POINT/COUNTERPOINT ON VACCINATION MANDATE

Since becoming an active Union leader nearly six years ago, I have never encountered a subject so compelling for members of our bargaining unit as the recent White House COVID-19 vaccine mandate. From the moment it was announced, texts, instant messages, emails, and phone calls have poured into AFGE Local 2369. Employees, on both sides of the issue, are extremely passionate about their position on vaccination and the mandate.

One group of employees believe that they are doing the right thing protecting themselves, their families, their fellow Americans, and co-workers. They feel that getting vaccinated is an act of compassion and even an act of patriotism. They vehemently defend the mandate and believe the White House made the right call.

On the other end of the spectrum, there are many employees who believe that the decision to vaccinate should be a personal decision made between themselves and their doctor or religious leader. This is the group I would like to discuss further.

Employees with legitimate medical conditions have been advised by their doctor that the vaccine may not be right for them at this time. Pregnant women have voiced concerns about getting vaccinated. Some of these women do not have an objection to being vaccinated but want to wait until giving birth. Others feel that because of previous Covid-19 infection, they have the same immunity as the vaccine would provide. Also, there are those with sincerely held beliefs, whether religious or otherwise, who have strong convictions against vaccination and the mandate.

There are those who do not believe that the government or their employer have the right to mandate what medicine they put into their bodies. Many in this group believe that it too is their patriotic duty to keep their fellow American's civil liberties in place and not allow government and employers to dictate to them important medical decisions.

Some may believe that these employees come from a "misinformed" or "brain-washed" segment of our society associated with a certain demographic or political affiliation. To the contrary, the employees contacting the Union come from every demographic, people of color, white, suburban, urban, all religious beliefs, all political affiliations, and everything in between.

These individuals have requested medical or religious exemptions and we are now seeing approvals for medical exemptions. As of this writing we have heard nothing on religious exemptions. We recommend that if you fit into a category that could qualify for an exemption, and have not already done so, please submit your exemption immediately. There is a process that must be followed, and it will be difficult to help you if the proper procedure is not followed.

As a Union, we deal with conditions of employment. We have heard from many that this vaccination mandate is the "ultimate" condition of employment; "no jab-no job!"

Regardless of our personal feelings, as a Union, it is our obligation to protect the rights of all bargaining unit employees. We strongly advise that if an employee does not have a medical or sincerely held religious objection to vaccination that they get vaccinated. On the other hand, we have encountered very legitimate objections and concerns that may prohibit a person from vaccination either now or in the future. Fully understand that the Union will do everything within the confines of our National Agreement and statute to ensure our bargaining unit employees rights are preserved. This vaccination mandate will surely be scrutinized by the courts, and we do not know what the outcome will be. AFGE 2369 truly has the best interests of all our bargaining unit employees in mind and will fight our battles as they arise.

Given that some employees have very legitimate medical situations or sincerely held religious beliefs on vaccination, we would expect nothing less of our bargaining unit employees than to not single out or treat those employees any differently. You never know where someone is in life or what medical or other life situation they may be facing.

Together we are Strong!

-Michael Iskander