

**American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees**  
*One strong united voice for Minnesota workers*

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Honorable Senators:

AFSCME Council 5 is a union of over 43,000 public and private sector workers in Minnesota. Our mission is to advocate for excellence in public services, dignity in the workplace, and opportunity and prosperity for all workers. Regarding existing and developing workplace vaccine policies, we'd like to submit these comments on behalf of our diverse membership, and we thank you for your consideration and attention to this important issue.

First, it is both appropriate and fair to acknowledge the historically unique era we are navigating through as well as the inherent challenges leaders face during such unprecedented times. There is nothing easy about leading during a global pandemic, when individual liberties seem to be at a crossroads with community care. From local school boards to the highest levels of government, leaders are forced to make really tough decisions, often without the guardrails of precedent, and apparently, always within a gauntlet of critics, many of whom appear to have opportunistic motives. We do not seek to disparage leaders for the decisions they're forced to make. Though we may not always agree, we can promote excellence in public services if we recommit to working collaboratively together.

AFSCME Council 5 does not support a vaccine mandate. Though we understand the importance of achieving as high a vaccination rate as possible, and we encourage all of our members to seek advice from their medical provider regarding receipt of a COVID-19 vaccine, we understand some people have personal, medical or religious reasons which factor into their individual decision and their decisions should be respected.

As far as the state's COVID-19 vaccine policy for employees is concerned, an absolutely critical element of this policy is the option for workers to undergo periodic testing as an alternative to receiving the vaccine. It is our position that any employer implementing a vaccine policy or a vaccine mandate, should incorporate a testing option as an alternative to employment termination if the employee chooses, for whatever reason, to not receive a COVID-19 vaccine. Again, we encourage all our members to consult with their medical provider and consider the benefits of getting a COVID-19 vaccine, but we recognize the decision is ultimately an individual one; the indignity of losing employment and the ability to provide for oneself and family should not be used to entice vaccine compliance without a testing alternative.

This critical element must be maintained in any future iterations of the state's employee vaccine policy. Additionally, ease of access to COVID-19 testing is another important part of workplace vaccine policies. Testing should be free to the employee and offered in the most convenient manner possible.

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Workplace safety has always been a central component to our union's mission. Among other things, a safe workplace should always be appropriately staffed. Many workplaces are dangerously understaffed and/or rely heavily on overtime to maintain safe staffing levels. Jumping to employment termination, without providing a testing option for the unvaccinated, not only strips individual choice away from workers, but it also jeopardizes appropriate staffing levels as some workers simply will not get vaccinated. Whether we understand or agree with their decision is irrelevant; we should not risk dangerous workplaces due to staffing shortages in our pursuit of safety from COVID, not when it is possible to adopt policies which maintain both individual choice and safe staffing levels, while also mitigating the risk of spreading the virus, through the use of free and readily available testing.

Thank you again for your time considering this important matter.

In Solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julie A. Bleyhl".

Julie Bleyhl  
Executive Director

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ethan Vogel".

Ethan Vogel  
Legislative Director