

Testimony for Maryland General Assembly Health and Government Operations
Committee HB0799

March 10, 2022

To: Delegate Shane E. Pendergrass and the Health and Government Operations Committee

Unfavorable: Written Testimony

My name is Jacqueline Zecher. I am a native Marylander with a deep connection to my community and a background in public health. As a health professional and concerned citizen, I feel compelled to express just how dangerous passing HB0799 would be. Passing this bill would be actively harmful not only to those applying to work/currently working for government institutions, but also other non-government citizens. **I implore you to reject the bill taking away the rights of state and local level government entities to require proof of COVID-19 vaccination as a condition for employment.**

Despite the controversy surrounding them, COVID-19 vaccines have been proven by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and National Institutes of Health to be successful in preventing serious illness and death, as well as lowering rates of contracting and spreading the virus. Additionally, the safety of the vaccines has been tested and approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, an organization designed to protect the American people. Therefore, there is no reason why someone should not receive this vaccine with the exceptions of persons with religious- and medical-related exemptions. With that being said, it is important to create a workplace environment that will prioritize the safety of the employees. One of the best ways to do this is to require proof of vaccination for all staff members and those who intend to work for a government agency.

Immunocompromised persons are at the highest risk for developing serious illness from COVID-19 infection. Most often, this group includes the elderly and individuals with disabilities. I, myself, am disabled and immunocompromised; therefore, this issue is of great significance to me and my family. As stated in the Americans with Disabilities Act, employers have the right to set rules that prevent individuals from directly posing a threat to an employee's health and safety in their workplace. Hiring potentially unvaccinated people would endanger any and all employees that fall into these categories. Further, the virus could be spread from an employee to a loved one with whom they come into contact or anyone who visits a government building. Providing government entities with the right to hire only vaccinated persons would significantly decrease this risk.

With the recent lift on mask mandates in government buildings, this discussion is all the more necessary. Placing high risk individuals in a work environment that exposes them to the COVID-19 virus on not one, but now potentially two levels, could mean disaster for the livelihood of the employee and/or their friends and family members. Protecting the people is of the utmost importance. We, as a community, must do our part to ensure the safety and success of our fellow citizens. Rejecting HB0799 is the only way to make this possible.

Thank you,

Jacqueline Zecher

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