

House District 60
Baker, Grant, Harney,
Malheur and Lake Counties



Committees
Water, Vice-Chair
Energy & Environment
Human Services
Education

REPRESENTATIVE MARK OWENS

SENT VIA EMAIL on AUGUST 16 and 18 to Legislative Counsel.

1. What steps will be involved in acquiring a medical or religious exemption for any public or private employment, or public activity for COVID-19?
2. Will there be any case where an individual will not be allowed to use a religious or medical exemption for terms of employment in the State of Oregon, if so please explain the details.
3. How will a medical or religious exemption be submitted? Will a note be acceptable, or will a form be used? Will each agency adopt their own forms?
4. For a medical exemption who can sign off on this, what professional title will be allowed?
5. For a religious exemption who can sign off on this?
6. Will the medical professional or religious leader be subject to board review or tracking if they are filling out forms or signing a note? Please explain the details.
7. Will the exemptions need to be updated? How often?
8. Does the State of Oregon shoulder any liability if an employee is injured or death occurs as result of vaccination for COVID-19 as a requirement for employment?
9. For those employees who have currently received and fully vaccinated for COVID-19, if a booster becomes available will they also be mandated to receive the booster and fall into the same requirements for employment?
10. Will this requirement for employment be temporary or permanent? If it is currently temporary, what steps are needed to be made permanent?
11. Where will the medical exemption information be stored? Who will have access to this information? Is the system secure? Do those who have access have training on protecting individual health information? Will the information be shared with other state employees or agencies if the employee moves from agency to agency?
12. How will this be audited for accuracy, by whom and how often?



Harney District Hospital

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August 25, 2021

Governor Kate Brown
Office of the Governor
900 Court Street, Suite 254
Salem, OR 97301-4047

Dear Governor Brown,

During the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic we did our best as health care providers to stay abreast of the constantly changing science and guidelines to provide the best care possible for our patients. We did all we could to make sure our staff had sufficient PPE, including N95 masks. We worked hard to secure sufficient tests for our at-risk patients, we set up tents for COVID-19 patients and made sure we had sufficient isolation rooms on our medical surgical floor. Our staff were health care heroes on the front lines battling a new enemy. They used all the tools available to them including masking and social distancing. To my knowledge, none of our staff have ever contracted the virus from any of our patients and none of our patients have contracted the virus from our staff.

We were excited to learn in late 2020 that a new tool would be available – the long awaited vaccine. The arrival of vaccines gave us hope that the virus would be eradicated and that we would be able to return to normal. Many in our community and among our staff quickly received the vaccine as soon as it was available to us. We were well on our way to winning the war against COVID-19. Then something curious happened. We plateaued both as a community and as employees around 40% vaccinated. Fear and mistrust began to spread and it became apparent that despite our desires to eradicate the virus through these new tools, the long-term effects of the vaccines were unknown and the majority of our community and staff were not comfortable taking the risk of getting the vaccine.

Now nine months later, with a new variant on the rise, reluctance to get the vaccine has persisted. For many of us, it's frustrating and disappointing to see people we love and care about contract the virus and go through so much pain and suffering (and even death) that could have been avoided with the vaccine.

When you recently made the decision to mandate vaccines for all health care workers we understood you were just trying to reduce that pain and suffering. Unfortunately in a strange counter intuitive way, for the small rural communities in eastern Oregon such as ours, that decision will actually have the opposite effect. More lives will be lost and we will see even greater pain and suffering. The mandate will not result in significantly more vaccinated health care workers, but rather will drive them out of our organizations to other states or out of health care all together. That one decision to mandate vaccines has done more to put our rural health system at risk than any other threat I have faced in my 30 years of working in hospitals. We have dozens of bright, well-educated staff who refuse to get vaccinated for a variety of reasons and most of them are prepared to leave rather than get vaccinated.

My managers have compiled data regarding what we can expect if the current mandate stays in effect. Seventy of our 192 employees (37%) have a high certainty of leaving their employment rather than comply with the vaccine requirement. Another 18 employees (10%) say they are likely to leave. That would leave us with 103 employees (55%) who say they would stay with us. But even those are leery of the extra work load and stress that would accompany their continued employment. Stratifying those rates by discipline tells a more ominous story.

Percent of employees highly certain to leave with mandate	Percent of employees both highly certain and likely to leave with mandate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revenue Cycle Department – 80% • Imaging Department – 71% • Materials Management Department – 67% • Lab Department – 57% • Emergency Medical Services – 56% • Medical Clinic Front Office Staff – 56% • Nursing Staff and CNAs – 48% • Environmental Services – 44% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilities Management – 66% • Nursing Staff and CNAs – 61% • Dietary Department – 50% • Medical Clinic clinical staff – 47%

Losing this many employees in these departments would make it nearly impossible to provide a consistently high level of services to our community. Losing this many EMS staff and nursing staff would completely shut down our ambulance service and hospital inpatient program. Losing this many lab and imaging employees would take out our diagnostic abilities to help our ER physicians make sound medical decisions for our patients. In short, without some changes and relief, the vaccine mandate will leave thousands of eastern Oregonians without adequate medical care.

Without a fully functioning hospital and ambulance service in Harney County (and potentially other eastern Oregon counties) significantly more lives will be at risk than have ever been at risk due to COVID-19. Dozens of trauma victims, resulting from automobile accidents each year on Oregon’s Highway 20 (the only east/west alternative to Interstate 84), will not get the timely treatment they need to save their lives. Care will be delayed for dozens of heart attack and stroke victims resulting in increased permanent brain and heart damage and increased deaths. Mothers delivering babies will need to drive two hours, possibly on icy and dangerous roads, just to deliver their babies. Again in a strange ironic way, a vaccine order meant to save lives will actually have the opposite effect.

The economic damage to our community will also be significant if this mandate goes forward. We are one of the largest employers in Harney County and recently raised our minimum wage to \$15.00 per hour for nearly all of our positions. We offer family wages and great benefits to our employees. Having a good solid hospital is critical to recruitment for other employers and to our retirees. Crippling or eliminating our services would have economic ripples for decades to come.

I implore you to reconsider your decision to require vaccines for our rural health care workers. Masking and social distancing continue to be effective tools in the fight against COVID-19. We join with our county health department in asking you to grant an exception to the vaccine mandate for health care workers in smaller rural Oregon counties such as ours.

Thank you for being mindful of our unique needs.



Dan Grigg
 CEO, Harney County Health District

8/24/21

Members of the City Council,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

My name is Casey Johnson, President of Baker City Professional Firefighters IAFF Local 922. I represent 12 full time firefighters in Baker who are tasked with emergency fire and medical response in both the city and county.

As I look around the room tonight, it's obvious this is a highly contentious topic. In the crowd, we've got nurses, law enforcement, teachers, doctors, military, and of course our concerned citizens. Regardless of your opinion, thank you for being here.

On Thursday August 19th 2021, Governor Brown ordered all healthcare workers and teachers in Oregon to get the Covid-19 vaccine as condition of employment. This mandate overrides a state statute that has been in place since 1989, and constitutes an egregious overreach by the governor, and a direct violation of free will. Personal choice over healthcare decisions should be left to the individual and their families to decide, not dictated by a politician. While the *legality* of Brown's action is debatable, *ethically* it is deeply wrong and misguided.

Throughout history tyrants have legalized their own oppressive measures in order to wield power in an unchecked fashion. Right now, in Afghanistan the Taliban have ordered citizens to turn in their firearms because "They're not needed any more. We will provide your protection for you." Kate Brown's mandate superseding personal choice is of a similar mindset; so much as saying "You no longer need to worry about whether this is right for you, we will make the decision for you!"

As first responders we have things called "protocols:" standard operating guidelines, prevention and pathogen training, decontamination procedures, infectious disease training, and many others. We take on the job knowing these hazards are a risk to our own health, because we want to be the ones our community relies upon in their time of need. We are here to serve. We are trained. We strive for safety for ourselves and our patients.

Governor Brown says that she is helping protect us from danger. Let me tell you, the last thing we need right now is an administrator's help in keeping us safe from ourselves through executive mandate. What she is actually doing is hurting us.

Let's look at who this mandate affects. As professional firefighters, we also serve as the county's emergency medical professionals in the field. We are Paramedics and EMT-

Intermediates, so obviously it affects us. Our partners in law enforcement, who we work so closely with on a daily basis, have patient contact, and as such will be forced to submit.

The way this mandate is written, any person in direct or indirect contact with a patient, even if they are 20 yards away, just there to shuttle equipment to trained providers, are subject to the vaccination rule. This means that our partners in volunteer fire agencies in remote areas, who are the first ones to get to patients, perform assessments, and begin immediate treatments while they wait for our ambulance to arrive and take over care, are being forced into a decision point. These volunteers are critical in helping stabilize patients in areas where we may take upwards of an hour just to get there. They provide us with an extra set of hands that we desperately need in those situations. Again, they are VOLUNTEERS. They are not getting paid for their work. They have other livelihoods they have to worry about. It's not worth it to many of them to be subjected to vaccination against their will. I spoke with a chief of one such agency today and he reports he will lose 90% of his volunteers due to this mandate. Let me repeat that number: 90%.

I have been in contact with other departments throughout the state over the last several days. If the governor chooses to continue on this path and chip away at our civil rights, we stand to lose 25% up to 50% of career professionals in the fire service, who chose liberty over overreach. This includes VACCINATED firefighters and EMS professionals too. People with vast knowledge and experience that can't be taught in school, but earned on the job day in and day out. The unintended consequences of this action are so vast it's hard to wrap your head around.

To be clear, I am not an anti-vacc'er. I myself am vaccinated against Covid-19, as well as many other members of our local union. We made this choice after careful consideration, weighing the pros and cons with our significant others, our families, our friends, and our physicians. As a person who is vaccinated and an elected community member, I believe the Governor's focus should be on empowering communities with resources and education, providing Oregonians with the tools to help them sort through the confusion of misinformation surrounding Covid vaccinations, without fear-based rhetoric, tyrannical disregard for law, or threats of heavy fines and loss of job security. We know the benefits of vaccinations of all kinds. Smallpox, cholera, hepatitis, influenza, measles, pertussis, polio, and on and on. We know these vaccines work to improve our health because we've had the time and science to back them up. If Governor Brown is frustrated that more people haven't gotten the Covid vaccine, she needs to give them time. The decision to get any vaccine is not without risk. We make these decisions for ourselves and our families with our best intent of our own health and wellbeing. As of yesterday, the Pfizer vaccine has received full FDA approval. This is fantastic news, but as nurse Stephanie mentioned earlier, FDA approval is not complete guarantee of your safety. I urge everyone in this room to think long and hard about getting it. I have seen firsthand patients in the last few moments of their lives, struggling to breath, suffering from complications of Covid-19. The

vaccine reportedly has the potential to lessen these effects even if you still have a “breakthrough case.” But to MANDATE this for healthcare workers, to threaten them with \$500 fines, and to threaten our first responders, nurses and teachers with termination is completely and wholly wrong.

The governor is exercising broad power never before seen in this state. Her unchecked self-appointed emergency power has gone too far, and for far too long. Government exists to protect individual rights, not to take them away. Speaking with our community members, I have heard many times that citizens are understandably suspicious of the timeline in which these vaccines have been pushed through. By her mandate Governor Brown has turned people away from being on the fence and effectively pushing them over the other side in resistance and caused MASSIVE distrust in the process. She has pushed many of my own friends into a state of rebellious obstinance that will be even harder to sway back into convincing.

There is a balance that must be maintained. Rather than spending another minute of her time forcing professionals to chose career over liberty, she should put all hands on deck to provide EDUCATION, SCIENTIFIC FACT, and EMPOWERMENT. That is the role of government in a time of crisis. Not to create MORE CRISIS and public healthcare shortages that overwhelm the ones that remain to shoulder the burden of an already overtaxed system.

Covid is real and its here. We know that people with “pre-existing conditions” are most at risk for contracting this disease. Conditions like hypertension, diabetes, heart disease, stroke, sleep apnea and other breathing disorders. These people are the most vulnerable to the effects of Covid-19. These types of conditions are for the most part PREVENTABLE. As the saying goes, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. We have the tools and the knowledge to put massive efforts into preventing these health conditions. Why not instead focus our efforts on preventing the conditions that lead to poor outcomes with Covid-19. Do not force us into a position of distrust and rebellion. Do not force us into a shortage of trained professionals. Stop this madness.

I ask the city council for your help in this plea. The loss of our firefighters, paramedics, nurses, teachers, and law enforcement would cripple a community like ours. Please hear us. Please help us. Stand up for us and say NO to government overreach, because it won’t stop here.

I say to Governor Brown, from the members of Baker City Professional Firefighters and all others who chose liberty and free choice, let us make own informed decisions and

KEEP YOUR LAWS OFF MY BODY.

Casey Johnson

President IAFF Local 922

Baker City Professional Firefighters