

1 State of Arkansas
2 93rd General Assembly
3 Regular Session, 2021
4

A Bill

HOUSE BILL 1972

5 By: Representatives Bryant, Haak
6 By: Senator B. Ballinger
7

For An Act To Be Entitled

9 AN ACT REGARDING ISSUES IN EMPLOYMENT RELATED TO
10 CORONAVIRUS 2019 (COVID-19); TO PROVIDE EXEMPTIONS
11 FOR EMPLOYEES FROM FEDERAL MANDATES AND EMPLOYER
12 MANDATES RELATED TO CORONAVIRUS 2019 (COVID-19); TO
13 AUTHORIZE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS FOR AN INDIVIDUAL
14 TERMINATED DUE TO A REFUSAL TO BE VACCINATED AGAINST
15 CORONAVIRUS 2019 (COVID-19); TO DECLARE AN EMERGENCY;
16 AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.
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Subtitle

19 TO ADDRESS MANDATES RELATED TO
20 CORONAVIRUS 2019 (COVID-19); TO PROVIDE
21 EXEMPTIONS FOR EMPLOYEES FROM MANDATES
22 RELATED TO CORONAVIRUS 2019 (COVID-19);
23 AND TO DECLARE AN EMERGENCY.
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27 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ARKANSAS:
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29 SECTION 1. DO NOT CODIFY. Legislative findings and intent.

30 (a) The General Assembly finds that:

31 (1) The United States Government is mandating that employers
32 take actions related to coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) vaccinations, including
33 forcing an employee to be vaccinated against the employee's will;

34 (2) Vaccination mandates are an overreach of authority;

35 (3) Many employers and employees in Arkansas will soon be
36 subject to this vaccination mandate; and



1 (4) Arkansas employees need to be protected from this type of
 2 overreach.

3 (b) The General Assembly intends for this act to:

4 (1) Protect employees in Arkansas from impending terminations
 5 due to vaccination mandates; and

6 (2) Create the ability for funding to be available to assist
 7 employees in Arkansas with the costs associated with testing related to the
 8 vaccination mandate through the methods provided in this act, including
 9 without limitation coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) relief funds distributed from
 10 the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, Pub. L. No. 117-2.

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 12 SECTION 2. Arkansas Code Title 11, Chapter 5, Subchapter 1, is amended
 13 to add an additional section to read as follows:

14 11-5-118. Exemption for employees from mandates related to coronavirus
 15 2019 (COVID-19).

16 (a) An employer that requires or is mandated to require treatment for
 17 coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) or its variants, including without limitation a
 18 vaccination or immunization, for its employees shall provide a specific
 19 exemption process.

20 (b) The specific exemption process shall include options that allow
 21 the employee to produce either:

22 (1) A negative antigen detection test result or molecular
 23 diagnostic test result no more than one (1) time per week showing that the
 24 employee is not positive for coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19); or

25 (2) Proof of the presence of antibodies or T cell response for
 26 the virus that causes coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) on an annual basis from a
 27 licensed healthcare provider through a serological test.

28 (c)(1) If multiple proven test processes are available to an employee
 29 under subsection (b) of this section, the employee may choose which test to
 30 take.

31 (2) The employee may provide test results obtained outside of
 32 the employer or a licensed healthcare provider if the test meets the
 33 guidelines contained within the Policy for Coronavirus Disease-2019 Tests
 34 During the Public Health Emergency (Revised) issued by the United States
 35 Department of Health and Human Services Food and Drug Administration Center
 36 for Devices and Radiological Health.

1 (3) The cost of the testing shall be covered:

2 (A) Through the employee's health benefit plan; or

3 (B) If coverage is not provided under subdivision
4 (c)(3)(A) of this section, through any state or federal funding made
5 available to the general public or the employer to cover the test, including
6 without limitation coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) relief funds distributed from
7 the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, Pub. L. No. 117-2.

8 (d) An employer shall provide the specific exemption process required
9 under this section in addition to any other exemptions offered by the
10 employer.

11 (e) If an employee complies with the requirements of the specific
12 exemption process related to coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) as required by this
13 section, the employee shall not be terminated for mandates related to
14 coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19).

15 (f) Nothing in this section should be interpreted to modify any other
16 agreements between the employer and employee or to amend or affect the
17 employment-at-will doctrine, whether written or otherwise.

18 (g) The Department of Finance and Administration shall establish rules
19 regarding the method of distribution of coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) relief
20 funds from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, Pub. L. No. 117-2, to
21 employees and employers to cover the cost of testing, to include without
22 limitation the:

23 (1) Timely distribution of funds to recipients within thirty
24 (30) days;

25 (2) Establishment of an option for distribution to an employer
26 that chooses to receive funds for disbursement to employees; and

27 (3) Verification and method of authentication of receipts that
28 shall meet legislative auditing requirements, including without limitation
29 the development of forms.

30 (h) The department shall report to the Legislative Council on a
31 monthly basis on the disbursement of funds under this section.

32 (i) If an employee is terminated due to the employer's violation of
33 this section, the employee may be eligible for unemployment benefits in
34 addition to any other remedy available to the employee.

35 (j) This section shall expire on July 31, 2023, unless extended by the
36 General Assembly.

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 2 SECTION 3. Arkansas Code § 11-10-514, concerning disqualification for
 3 unemployment benefits generally due to discharge for misconduct, is amended
 4 to add an additional subsection to read as follows:

5 (d) An individual shall not be disqualified for benefits if he or she
 6 is terminated solely due to a refusal to be vaccinated against coronavirus
 7 2019 (COVID-19) or its variants.

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 9 SECTION 4. EMERGENCY CLAUSE. It is found and determined by the
 10 General Assembly of the State of Arkansas that mandates forcing actions
 11 related to coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) vaccinations are an overreach of
 12 authority; that vaccination mandates will be imposed on many employers and
 13 employees in Arkansas; that employees are facing impending terminations
 14 related to exercising their rights to refuse a vaccination; and that this act
 15 is immediately necessary to protect the people of Arkansas from this type of
 16 overreach. Therefore, an emergency is declared to exist, and this act being
 17 immediately necessary for the preservation of the public peace, health, and
 18 safety shall become effective on:

19 (1) The date of its approval by the Governor;

20 (2) If the bill is neither approved nor vetoed by the Governor,
 21 the expiration of the period of time during which the Governor may veto the
 22 bill; or

23 (3) If the bill is vetoed by the Governor and the veto is
 24 overridden, the date the last house overrides the veto.