



OPENING STATEMENT

House Committee on Education and Labor

Chairman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott

Opening Statement of Chair Suzanne Bonamici (OR-01)

Joint Subcommittee on Workforce Protections and Civil Rights and Human Services Hearing

Protecting Lives and Livelihoods: Vaccine Requirements and Employee Accommodations

Zoom

Tuesday, October 26, 2021 | 10:15 a.m.

Thank you, Chair Adams, for leading this hearing and to the Ranking Members for joining us for this important topic. And thank you, especially, to our witnesses for providing their experience and expertise.

In 1999, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention identified vaccination as the greatest public health achievement of the 20th century. Vaccinations have eradicated highly contagious diseases around the world and vaccination requirement programs have played a key role in preventing contagion and deadly viral outbreaks.

Today, children in Oregon and every other U.S. state and territory are required to be vaccinated against several different viruses, such as Polio, before they attend school. Notably, no cases of polio have originated in the United States since 1979.

That is important context for today's discussion about the role of vaccine requirements in ending the COVID-19 pandemic.

The rapid spread of the Delta variant of the coronavirus has continued to threaten the health and safety of American workers. It is now evident that the decision to get vaccinated is not just about protecting one individual. It is a decision that affects everyone around us.

For certain groups of workers—including older workers, workers with disabilities, and other workers with underlying health conditions—the risks associated with COVID-19 are potentially even more deadly. Even those fully vaccinated face a small possibility of a serious breakthrough infection.

During the global pandemic, our priority must be to protect the rights and freedoms of vulnerable individuals to work and to contribute to our economy—not the ability of individuals to endanger others.

I truly applaud the leadership demonstrated by Oregon-based Columbia Sportswear, who is represented here today, as well as other employers who recognize that vaccine requirements protect their employees and their communities – and the families of their employees.

Across the country, businesses are demonstrating that these policies work.

Today, we have an opportunity to discuss how workplace vaccine requirements can protect both the lives *and* livelihoods of all workers, particularly those at higher risk of serious illness or death from COVID-19.

Thank you, again, to our expert witnesses today. I am now pleased to turn it over to the Ranking Member of the Civil Rights and Human Services Subcommittee, Mr. Fulcher. Mr. Fulcher, welcome back. Nice to see you. I hope you're doing well.