

Testimony
of
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Before the Workplace Protections
and
Civil Rights and Human Services
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Of the
Education and Labor Committee
United States House of Representatives

Hearing on Protecting Lives and Livelihoods:
Vaccine Requirements And Employee Accommodations

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Chair Adams and Bonamici, Ranking Members Keller and Fulcher, Members of the Subcommittees, thank you for the invitation to testify. My name is Richelle Luther, and I am the Senior Vice President of Corporate Affairs and Chief Human Resources Officer for Columbia Sportswear Company.

We are a global company headquartered in Portland, Oregon. We have almost than 8,000 employees worldwide, we operate in 90 countries and we have and more than 90 stores in almost every state in the country.

When the pandemic hit the United States, like other retailers, we shut down all of our U.S. stores and sent headquarters employees home. Our U.S distribution centers and call centers in Portland and Kentucky stayed open, continuing to fulfill online orders. Our stores gradually

began opening up, as states began returning to business. Our headquarters employees are still not in the office yet, but we have plans to have everyone back to the office by the end of the first quarter in 2022.

In order to reopen, we have taken extraordinary measures with sanitation, distancing and physical barriers, and, of course, masks.

Our CEO, Tim Boyle, is a vocal proponent of vaccinations. His aunt, Hildegard Lamfrom, was one of the early researchers who contributed to the development of the polio vaccine. Since the vaccines became available, he has personally encouraged and exhorted our employees to get vaccinated. He has authorized paid time off to receive the shot, as well as catastrophic paid leave if an employee has an adverse reaction to the vaccine. He encouraged employees to volunteer at mass vaccination sites with paid leave to do so. We brought mobile clinics to our headquarters and distribution centers to make it easy for people to get vaccinated. We have concluded that these efforts are not sufficient, particularly in light of Delta and potential future variants. We still have too many unvaccinated employees.

We were on the brink of mandating vaccinations for our employees when President Biden announced a vaccine mandate for employers with more than 100 people. We celebrated this announcement as a tool to help us achieve our goal of full vaccination. In this labor market, we appreciate the government's support in leveling the playing field to enable us to do the right thing. If all companies mandate vaccinations as a condition of employment, we will be able to retain our valued employees and keep our company in business. We don't want to lose employees to locations or companies that do not have vaccine mandates.

One of the biggest struggles of the last two years is that we are dealing with an ever-changing patchwork of health and safety regulations that, in many cases, have differed not just state to state, but county by county. At one critical moment, as we were trying to reopen a store, we were unable to do so, because the store straddled two counties that were in different stages of reopening. A federal mandate is needed. We do not believe it is MORE regulation for business, but rather, less. A quilt of local laws and approaches created vastly more regulation of business, more uncertainty, risk and inefficiency.

Implementing a vaccine mandate will be complex. We need guidance from the federal government on how to process accommodations, particularly for religious exemptions. We are grappling with how to implement testing in our retail environments. It will be logistically challenging and extraordinarily expensive. Our goal is for everyone to be vaccinated to help the country get past the pandemic, to create economic growth and opportunity and advance public safety.

One of the hallmarks of Columbia Sportswear is that we are adept at innovation. We find ways to keep people warm, dry, cool and protected by their clothing when they are enjoying activities. We have an innovation here, in the form of vaccines, to help us defeat this virus. We

want to embrace this scientific innovation and get everyone vaccinated, so that vulnerable children and adults with medical conditions that do not allow vaccination will be protected.

We're an outdoor company. One of the things that defines the outdoors is an appreciation of the world's natural wonders where people of all backgrounds and viewpoints come together. We need to come together to protect public health and safety. We can do that by getting everyone vaccinated.

Thank you for your time.