



ADVERTISEMENT



Verizon The advanced network for first responders
Frontline

Learn more >

HOMELAND SECURITY

Losing a Job for not Being Vaccinated for COVID-19

Workplace vaccination requirements are expected to become increasingly contentious, and the issue could be especially pressing in the health care industry, where employees work closely with vulnerable patients.

May 26, 2021 • Lisa Schencker, Chicago Tribune



Never miss a story with the GovTech Today newsletter.



SUBSCRIBE

(TNS) - When Melissa Fisher learned she'd have to get vaccinated to keep her job, she tried to fight it.

Fisher, who works in an assisted living and memory care facility run by Chicago -based Enlivant, gave the company a letter from her pastor explaining her religious objection. Fisher also volunteered to get tested for COVID-19 each week, rather than be vaccinated.

But Enlivant stood firm, telling her in an email Friday that her request to forgo vaccination was denied because of the nature of her job and "the threat to yourself and others from remaining unvaccinated."

ADVERTISEMENT

A black rectangular advertisement for Verizon Frontline. The word "Verizon" is in white, and "Frontline" is in large red letters. Below it, the text "The advanced network for first responders" is in white. At the bottom left is the Verizon logo, and at the bottom right is the text "Learn more" followed by a right-pointing chevron.

Verizon
Frontline
The advanced network
for first responders

verizon 

Learn more >

Never miss a story with the GovTech Today newsletter.

SUBSCRIBE

nday.

edom of religion, my rights, but apparently we don't

have that right anymore,” said Fisher, who is an apostolic holiness Christian. Enlivant has more than 200 facilities across the country, including in Rockford and Joliet . Fisher, who works at an Enlivant facility in Tennessee , helps residents with daily tasks, such as dressing and going to the bathroom.

Workplace vaccination requirements are expected to become increasingly contentious as more offices reopen, and the issue could be especially pressing in the health care industry, where employees often work closely with elderly or vulnerable patients.

ADVERTISEMENT

A black rectangular advertisement for Verizon Frontline. The word "Verizon" is in white, and "Frontline" is in large red letters. Below it, the text "The advanced network for first responders" is in white. At the bottom left is the Verizon logo with a red checkmark, and at the bottom right is the text "Learn more >" in white.

Verizon Frontline

The advanced network
for first responders

verizon✓

Learn more >

“I think if any type of employer will be mandating the vaccine, it will be in the health care space,” said Margo Wolf O’Donnell, a partner and co-chair of the labor and employment

group at law firm Donoghue in Chicago.

Never miss a story with the GovTech Today
newsletter.

SUBSCRIBE

Employment Opportunity Commission, employees
d from vaccination requirements because of sincerely

held religious beliefs or because of disabilities. But legal experts say employers can still require the shots if an unvaccinated person would pose a direct threat to others in the workplace, or if accommodating him or her would be an undue burden.

Enlivant is requiring its workers to get at least their first vaccine shots by June 1 , spokesman Jeremy Ross said in a statement. The company evaluates requests for religious or medical exceptions on a case-by-case basis and accommodates those employees if it can do so safely, he said.

“We provide direct care to vulnerable senior residents, who trust us to provide a safe and healthy living environment,” Ross said in the statement. “We are equally dedicated to providing a safe and healthy work environment for our valued employees. These are our first priorities and the COVID vaccine is key to ensuring success toward these priorities.”

So far, few Illinois health care companies are requiring employee vaccinations. Many have stayed away from mandating vaccines for workers because the shots have received emergency use authorization, but not full approval, from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration . Pfizer said recently it hoped to secure full approval in the coming months.

Many agencies that provide home health care may revisit the issue of COVID-19 vaccine requirements once the shots gain full approval, said Sara Ratcliffe , executive director of the Illinois HomeCare and Hospice Council .

In the hospital community, “there’s a lot of discussion” about it, said Danny Chun , a spokesman for the Illinois Health and Hospital Association .

The short supply of health care workers has made some health care companies, such as long-term care facilities, hesitant to require the vaccine.

“Because of staffing pressures the sector faces, it’s hard to say, ‘I’m going to mandate it,’ and then lose another four CNAs (certified nursing assistants) you desperately need who are caring for residents,” said Matt Hartman , executive director of the Illinois Health Care Association .

Never miss a story with the GovTech Today
newsletter.

SUBSCRIBE

ing workplace vaccine mandates by employers
e been filed in federal court in other states, but no
cases, said Gregory Abrams , a partner at Faegre

Drinker Biddle & Reath in Chicago .

Abrams expects to see more such lawsuits.

“I think as employees return to work and vaccines become more common and more expected, I would expect more employees potentially to push the envelope,” he said.

Fisher, the Tennessee woman, said she is one of about a half dozen workers at her facility who don’t want to get vaccinated and are losing their jobs. Enlivant spokesman Ross declined to say how many of the company’s workers across the country are refusing shots or if any were in Illinois .

Fisher’s objection to the vaccination is twofold. She’s worried about the long-term effects of the vaccine. Fisher said she also believes requirements to get vaccines could be a first step toward the “mark of the beast,” an apocalyptic reference from the book of Revelation.

She said she would never endanger the people for whom she cares, and she wears masks and gloves. She doesn’t think it makes sense for Enlivant to require her to get vaccinated when outside health care workers and visitors are allowed in the facility without proof of vaccination.

“I understand that I’m dealing with the elderly, and I don’t take that lightly,” Fisher said. “They’re my family, and I’m not going to do anything to jeopardize them.”

Fisher said she plans to start a new job June 8 .

Ischencker@chicagotribune.com

©2021 Chicago Tribune. Visit [chicagotribune.com](https://www.chicagotribune.com). Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC.



Never miss a story with the GovTech Today
newsletter.

SUBSCRIBE

ADVERTISEMENT



Featured Resources



Protect Your Agency from Today's Mobile Security Threats

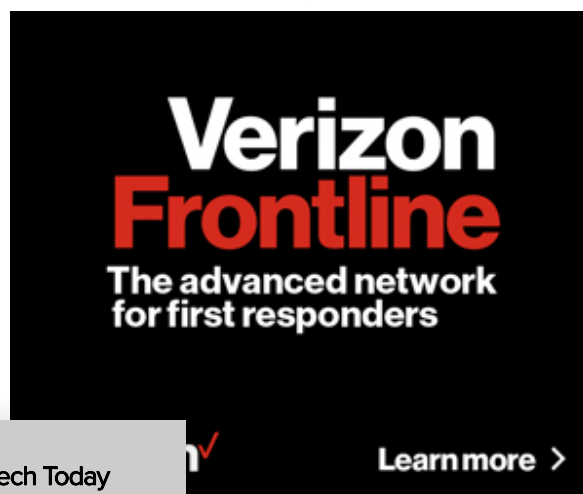
Verizon Launches Verizon Frontline

Verizon Connects Los Angeles Frontline Heroes and Local Restaurants

[Webinar] Your First Responders Rely on Collaboration

[Video] Augmented Reality for First Responders

ADVERTISEMENT



Never miss a story with the GovTech Today newsletter.

SUBSCRIBE

Tweets by @vzpublicsector



Verizon Public Sector Retweeted



Verizon Careers ✓
@VerizonCareers

From the military to Verizon, the Orecchio family has stood by each other every step of the way. Dad Joe, mom Monica and son Schuyler each had a unique and inspiring transition to the V Team. Read more on the [#VerizonWorks](#) blog. [#vzcareers](#) [#Thanks2Vets](#) [vz.to/2Tbb9TQ](#)



[Embed](#)

[View on Twitter](#)

ADVERTISEMENT

Verizon
Frontline

The advanced network for first responders

[Learn more >](#)

Special Projects

Local.US

Innovative cloud resources for medium and small sized cities and counties.

ORACLE

Government 360

Innovation at Cloud Speed

Never miss a story with the GovTech Today newsletter.

[SUBSCRIBE](#)

Efficient



Grants Made Simple

Simplify the entire grants process with our innovative software and services

Government, for the People

Infoblox Public Sector



Sponsored Articles



SPONSORED

A Holistic Approach to Cloud for Local Government

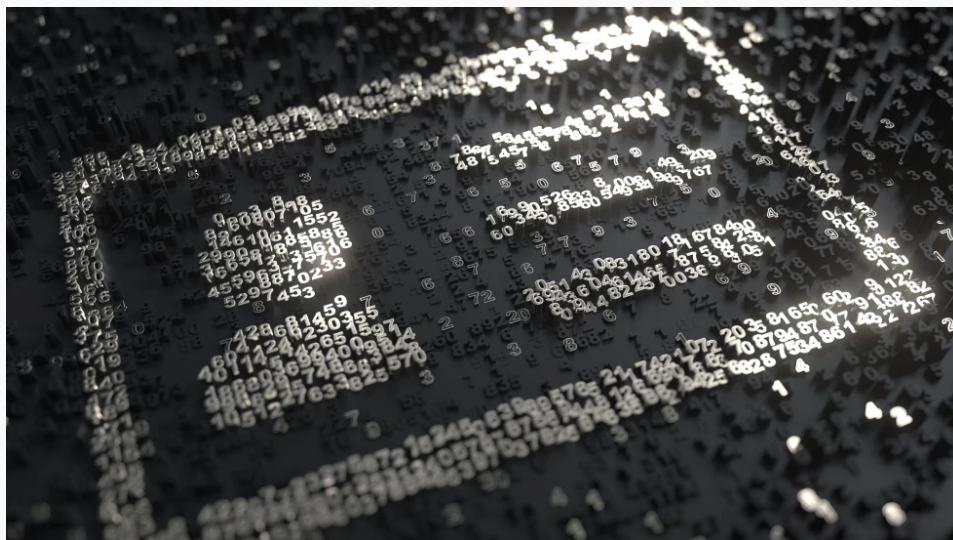
May 26, 2021



Never miss a story with the GovTech Today newsletter.

SUBSCRIBE

May 26, 2021



SPONSORED

How Digital Credentials Can Transform Service Delivery in State and Local Government

May 25, 2021



SPONSORED

Why Your Cybersecurity Posture Should be a Zero

May 21, 2021

Never miss a story with the GovTech Today
newsletter.

SUBSCRIBE

Load More



Solutions for state and local government.

[Events](#)

[Webinars](#)

[Papers](#)

[GovTech360 Podcast](#)

[Sponsored: Industry Q&As](#)

[About](#)

[Privacy](#)

[Contact](#)

[Advertise](#)

Stay Up To Date

Get smart with GovTech. Your guide to technology in state & local government.

[SIGN UP FOR NEWSLETTERS](#)

[GET THE MAGAZINE](#)

©2021 All rights reserved. e.Republic
California Residents - Do Not Sell My Personal Information



GOVERNING

techwire

NAVIGATOR

EMERGENCY
MANAGEMENT

CENTER FOR
DIGITAL
GOVERNMENT

CENTER FOR
DIGITAL
EDUCATION

Never miss a story with the GovTech Today
newsletter.

[SUBSCRIBE](#)