

Day Care Group Warns Vaccine Mandates Will Lead To Less Access

by Greg Bishop
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SPRINGFIELD – Operators of licensed daycares in Illinois say the governor's COVID-19 vaccine mandate on the industry will make a staffing crisis even more acute.

Gov. J.B. Pritzker issued the executive order Friday for daycare workers to be vaccinated. The order applies to the state's 2,872 licensed daycare facilities with an estimated 55,000 people workers.

“Vaccinations offer life-saving protection for the people who receive them and make the community safer for the people who can’t – including the babies, toddlers, and young children not yet eligible for the vaccine,” the governor said in a statement. “By extending vaccine-or-test requirements to those who work at licensed daycare centers, we are adding another level of protection for our youngest residents and preventing outbreaks in daycare centers as more and more parents return to work.”

Women of the Illinois Republican Senate Caucus said the mandate is shortsighted and will exacerbate the staffing issues at daycares.

“The reality is the most recent mandate is an attack on working mothers as they resume a more normal work schedule,” said a joint statement from Senate Republican Deputy Leader Sue Rezin, R-Morris, State Sens. Terri Bryant, R-Murphysboro, Sally Turner, R-Beason, and Jil Tracy, R-Quincy. “Governor Pritzker’s action has the potential to exacerbate an already growing child care crisis in our state.”

Sarah Stoliker with Illinois Directors and Owners of Childcare Centers agreed.

“We’re not opposed to public health measures that will help bring this pandemic to an end, but there has to be a balance,” Stoliker said in an interview.

Stoliker said for years, even before COVID-19, there was a severe staffing shortage for daycares across the state, which limits availability for working families.

“And regardless of how one feels about vaccine mandates, this policy is going to lead to more daycare closures and less access to daycare slots for working families across the state,” Stoliker said.

Her group wasn’t consulted by the administration before Friday’s announcement, Stoliker said, and she’s not surprised.

“For all of the lip service, this administration has rebuffed meaningful engagement with the frontline managers and workers to address the challenges facing our industry since Day 1,” Stoliker said. “They seem to prefer a top-down approach that pays little attention to the real-world impacts.”

The governor’s office hasn’t returned messages seeking comment.

The final dose for daycare workers is required by Jan. 3 or they can test weekly.

Stoliker said facilities will likely struggle to implement the mandate, let alone cover the cost for regular testing.

“And I’ve got to now provide another staff person in my classroom to cover that person out getting a test,” Stoliker said. “It’s very cumbersome.”