

Gov. Pritzker Signs Law To Ensure COVID-19 Protections

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SPRINGFIELD — At the request of the Attorney General, Governor JB Pritzker today signed SB 1169 into law, clarifying the legislative intent of the Health Care Right of Conscience Act so that it cannot be abused or misinterpreted to jeopardize workplace safety. This amendment will ensure the long tradition of vaccine requirements by employers can continue with regard to the COVID-19 vaccine.

“Masks, vaccines, and testing requirements are life-saving measures that keep our workplaces and communities safe,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “Keeping workplaces

safe is a high priority, and I applaud the General Assembly for ensuring that the Health Care Right of Conscience Act is no longer wrongly used against institutions who are putting safety and science first.”

The Health Care Right of Conscience Act was originally enacted to allow medical professionals to refuse to receive or participate in healthcare services that are contrary to their personal beliefs, including religious or moral objections to specific services, such as abortion.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the law has been improperly invoked to evade employers’ requirements for testing, masking, and vaccines. The misuse of the law’s original intent has put customers, staff, and community members at risk by exposing employers to legal retaliation for enacting life-saving public health measures.

“With Governor Pritzker’s signature today, we continue our effort to keep the people of this state as safe as possible,” said House Speaker Emanuel “Chris” Welch (D-Westchester). “Despite deliberate attempts to misinform the public, nothing about this law takes away anyone’s rights to claim religious or medical exemption, which are protected by federal law. While only a small minority of people are skirting COVID-19 requirements, our goal is to make sure workers in high-risk environments are doing what’s needed to fulfill their responsibility to public health and keep everyone alive and healthy.”

“I hope this provides clarity to the situation as we work to protect the public’s health and beat back this pandemic that has taken so much from us,” said Senate President Don Harmon (D-Oak Park).

“Today we are taking critical action to protect people in high-risk environments—such as hospitals, veterans’ homes, and schools—from the dangers of COVID-19,” said State Representative Robyn Gabel (D-Evanston). “While this law will not take away anyone’s right to claim exemptions based on religion or medical need, it prevents a small group of people from distorting the meaning of the Health Care Right of Consciousness Act and putting some of our most vulnerable members of society in danger. I would like to thank Governor Pritzker for the steps he’s taking today.”

This amendment preserves the legislative intent established by the Act’s 40 years of precedent, clarifying that it is not a violation of the Act to take workplaces measures intended to prevent the spread of deadly, communicable diseases like COVID-19.

The law explicitly reiterates federal protections of sincerely held religious objections.

SB 1169 is effective June 1, 2022.

