

DAVID B. MCKINLEY, P.E.

1ST DISTRICT, WEST VIRGINIA

2239 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515

TEL: (202) 225-4172

FAX: (202) 225-7564

www.mckinley.house.gov

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November 22, 2021

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

As you are aware, on Sept. 9, 2021 President Biden declared that all companies with more than 100 employees would be required to have all employees vaccinated by January 4, 2022 or be forced to lay off unvaccinated staff or face a fine of up to \$14,000 per case¹.

Furthermore, the executive order went on to require all healthcare workers who work in facilities that accept Medicaid and Medicare to be vaccinated or face termination. This has only increased the staffing shortage facing many healthcare providers as COVID continues to strain health systems².

One glaring omission from the list of those mandated is people who receive benefits through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, known as SNAP. Nationally, SNAP provides help to more than 42 million Americans each year³, nearly all of which qualify for Medicaid as provided by the Affordable Care Act (ACA)⁴.

Unfortunately, vaccination rates among Medicaid recipients are far lower than the general population⁵. A nationwide poll found that 45 percent of individuals earning under \$50,000 said they were both unvaccinated and hesitant to get vaccinated. That number dropped to 35 percent for individuals earning \$50,000 to \$79,000 and to 26 percent for those earning more than \$80,000⁶.

¹ <https://www.businessinsider.com/biden-vaccine-rules-14000-per-employee-fines-for-breaking-2021-11>

² <https://www.fiercehealthcare.com/hospitals/how-many-employees-have-hospitals-lost-to-vaccine-mandates-numbers-so-far>

³ <https://hungerandhealth.feedingamerica.org/explore-our-work/programs-target-populations/snap-eligible-households/>

⁴ <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/23566/412808-Using-SNAP-Receipt-to-Establish-Verify-and-Renew-Medicaid.PDF>

⁵ <https://khn.org/news/article/medicaid-vaccination-rates-founder-as-states-struggle-to-immunize-their-poorest-residents/>

⁶ <https://www.rollcall.com/2021/06/30/medicaid-beneficiaries-less-likely-to-get-covid-19-shots/>

I want to make it clear; I oppose vaccine mandates of any kind. However, if the goal of the Biden Administration's mandate is to get all Americans vaccinated it seems counterproductive to exclude the population that is not likely to be vaccinated while punishing the workforce that supplies the majority of the tax revenue in this country.

As the provider of SNAP benefits, I encourage you to consider the health of your beneficiaries. Please provide answers to the following questions as soon as possible.

1. Will USDA be mandating vaccination against COVID-19 as a condition of participation in the SNAP program?
2. How is USDA working with the department of Health and Human Services to ensure beneficiaries have access to COVID-19 vaccinations?
3. Will participants in the SNAP program be penalized for not being vaccinated?

Thank you for your prompt attention to these matters. Should you have any questions please reach out to Kirsten Wing of my staff at Kirsten.wing@mail.house.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David B. McKinley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, circular flourish at the beginning of the name.

David B. McKinley P.E.
Member of Congress