New American

Chicago Police Union Chief Tells Officers to Defy City's Vaccine Mandate

In blunt terms, John Catanzara, head of Chicago's Fraternal Order of Police, urged his members to ignore Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot's vaccine mandate in a video on Tuesday night. He said that her demand violated personal rights as well as the union agreement under which the officers work. If she doesn't relent, he said, he's prepared to file suit.

Back in August, Lightfoot rolled out her vaccine mandate ordering every city employee, including police officers, to report their COVID vaccination status by Friday, October 15, or risk being put on unpaid leave. Employees may apply for medical or religious exemptions.

This was too much for Catanzara:

> [Her announcement] has literally lit a bomb underneath the membership....
>
> What are they gonna do when four or five thousand coppers say, "screw you, I'm staying home?" You're not making me get this [expletive deleted] vaccination. Don't pay me. That's fine. We'll see you in court....
>
> You're not gonna pay me? You're gonna make me stay home? You're gonna have thousands of coppers willing to stay home, not getting paid to not get a vaccine and then, what are you gonna do for manpower on the streets?

YouTube
John Catanzara

Lightfoot is already getting pressure to reverse her decision from aldermen who fear that Catanzara's threat is real. On Wednesday, Southwest Side Aldermen Marty Quinn (13th) and Matt O'Shea (19th) called on her not to enforce the deadline: "Our main concern is about losing police officers as we face a dwindling police force and rising incidents of crime and violence."

In 2019 (through October) the city suffered 402 homicides. In 2020, that number jumped 50 percent to 605. Through October this year homicides increased to 629.

Six other aldermen sent Lightfoot a letter urging her to drop the mandate, calling it "an infringement on [workers'] personal freedoms."

Indeed, the forms the city is requiring in order to apply for religious or medical exemptions are invasive. The city's "Religious Exemption Request" demands that the applicant "state your reason" for requesting the exemption, and then asks:

> What is the principle of your religious beliefs that conflicts with taking the COVID-10 vaccine?
>
> When did you begin practicing this religion or following these beliefs?
>
> Do your religious beliefs include objections to other vaccines or medications? If so, please explain.

The religious exemption application then requires the signature of a person's "religious or spiritual leader" attesting to the "sincerity" of his beliefs.

The application for medical exemption is equally invasive. After providing personal information, the applicant must then provide his or her healthcare provider's information as well. The provider then must show that "the patient has a documented severe life-threatening allergic reaction to such vaccines, and provide appropriate documentation."

The alternative is that the healthcare provider explain the "physical condition of the patient or medical circumstances relating to the individual … such that immunization is not considered safe. Please state, with sufficient detail for independent medical review, the specific nature of the medical condition or circumstances that contraindicate immunization with the COVID-19 vaccine."

It is clear that these "exemption applications" are carefully crafted so that neither of them is likely to be granted.

So, Catanzaro created a third: a "conscientious objection" application:

> Please be advised that, pursuant to the Illinois Health Care Right of Conscience Act, 745 ILCS 70 ("Act"), I have a genuine and sincere wish to be exempt from the Police Department's vaccine mandate.
>
> This request is based on my deeply and sincerely held religious, moral, and/or philosophical convictions that are based on belief in and relation to God, or which, though not so derived, arises from a place my life that is parallel to that filled by God among adherents to religious faiths.
>
> On the basis of my moral convictions, I do not believe that health and disease should be controlled by vaccination, or, furthermore, that governments should coerce citizens into receiving medical interventions.
>
> My refusal to accept a mandatory vaccine is not only grounded in my conscience, but also sanctioned and permitted by this law.

Catanzara urged his members to complete the third form and send it in on Thursday. And then return to work on Friday, fully expecting to be laid off without pay the next day. Said Catanzara:

I can guarantee you that no-pay status will not last more than 30 days.

There's no way [Lightfoot is] going to be able to sustain a police department workforce at 50 percent capacity or less for more than seven days without something budging.

The pushback by police officers against vaccine-mandate overreach is appearing in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Denver. Pushback is also appearing among airline pilots and truck drivers, threatening the delivery pipeline for goods and services.

Catanzara is right: "Whatever happens because of that manpower issue, that falls at the mayor's doorstep."

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