

Testimony before the:
Pennsylvania Senate
Senate Majority Policy Committee
Regional Hearing

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Good morning Chairman Scavello and members of the Pennsylvania Senate Majority Policy Committee. My name is Stacey Header, and I am the Chief Financial Officer for Solar Innovations, a custom manufacturer of doors, windows and enclosures in Pine Grove. My husband and I started the company in 1998 and built it to a \$30 million enterprise with 140 team members currently. I testify before you today representing my company and the issue of vaccine mandates for employers and the impact on our workplace.

If a vaccine mandate proceeds, I anticipate a very negative impact in our ability to retain some of our current employees. Our vaccination rate is about 45% of our workforce based on vaccination cards that were provided to us. Employees have already expressed their concerns about the mandate, and I do not foresee most getting vaccinated if they have not already.

I also anticipate this impacting our ability to hire new team members. The labor shortage was an issue prior to the pandemic and is now a complete crisis, not just for us, but for employers in all industries. We are competing with local distribution and warehousing facilities and are struggling to fill our openings. To retain and attract employees, we evaluated hourly and production team member's and office team member's compensation levels and made adjustments, increasing payroll an average of 2.5% on two separate occasions from Aug 2020 to April 2021, and again in September 2021, when we increased wages 4.5% for our hourly production team. Most employees are also working overtime because of the staffing shortage.

As of August, the unemployment rate in Schuylkill County where Solar Innovations is located is 7.5%, which is above the state average. We have higher turnover due to the 'Great Resignation' as well as retirements, and we are having extreme difficulty filling those positions.

We are also struggling to keep up with production due to about 10% less employees than we had last year because of the current labor market. We have grown in spite of all of this, but we could have grown much more in a “regular” labor market.

There is still concern for the potential liability exposure should an employee have an adverse reaction to the vaccine, and it doesn't appear that there are protections in place for employers. In fact, there have been no liability protections in place for employers since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic 20 months ago.

This mandate is an unprecedented government regulation, whether it is a vaccine mandate or a mandate to provide weekly testing. Our company would be required to set up a tracking system, and provide paid time off for both testing and vaccinations, or we will be facing extremely expensive fines. How are employers expected to come up with the manpower to enforce this mandate? Testing is a concern as PCR and rapid tests have proven to be faulty, providing many false positives, and tests are not always readily available. It is both costly and burdensome to our HR Department when our focus needs to be on retaining employees and recruiting.

We have already put measures in place to keep our employees safe, such as screening questions related to exposure and symptoms, temperature scans, requiring masking (which remains a feat), social distancing, additional cleaning procedures, and reduced team events, which also has negatively affected morale. There is no proof or data to show that COVID spreads in a workplace that is following standard safety guidelines, which we have done from the beginning. In addition, there is an abundance of data to show that vaccinated individuals can become infected and then transmit the virus to others with the same viral load as an unvaccinated individual.

Employers are being tasked with forcing OSHA's vaccine mandate onto our employees or be punished with fines, in essence stripping individuals of their free will and medical autonomy, while simultaneously invading their privacy in relation to their medical decisions and their religious beliefs. To quote Kyle Warner, a 29 year-old professional mountain bike racer who was injured from the COVID vaccine and spoke before politicians at the Real, Not Rare rally in Washington DC last Tuesday, he said, “I believe where there is risk, there needs to be a choice.” There also appears to be a question as to the legality of this rule and for the reasons just discussed, I am emphatically opposed to this mandate.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before this committee.