



U.S. District Court dismisses challenge to hospital's employee vaccine mandate

June 15, 2021

On April 1, 2021, Houston Methodist Hospital announced that all of its employees would be required to be vaccinated against COVID-19 by June 7, 2021, but that it would provide accommodations to any employee with disability (under the ADA) or sincerely-held religious belief (under Title VII) that prevented him/her from receiving the vaccine. Nurse Jennifer Bridges and 116 other employees, who did not claim to have pursued such accommodations, sued to block the vaccine requirement. The hospital moved to dismiss the case, and on June 12, 2021, [the court granted the dismissal](#).

The court concluded that Bridges wrongful termination claim failed because Texas law only protects employees from being terminated for refusing to commit an act carrying criminal penalties to the worker, and receiving a COVID-19 vaccination carries no such penalties. It affirmed that the Secretary of Health and Human Services had the ability to introduce commercial medical products (such as the COVID-19 vaccines) into interstate commerce in an emergency.

Among other claims, Bridges also asked the court to declare that the vaccine requirement is invalid because it violates federal law protections of "human subjects." The court said Bridges had misconstrued this provision and misrepresented the facts and noted that the hospital's employees are not participants in a human trial.

The court's decision concluded by stating "Methodist is trying to do their business of saving lives without giving them the COVID-19 virus. It is a choice made to keep staff, patients, and their families safer. Bridges can freely choose to accept or refuse a COVID-19 vaccine; however, if she refuses, she will simply need to work somewhere else."

In December 2020, the [EEOC confirmed](#) that employers can require that employees receive the COVID-19 vaccination as a condition of employment, subject to reasonable accommodations for employees with disabilities or sincerely-held religious beliefs.

An appeal is expected.

Authors
