

NEWS RELEASE



For Immediate Release
February 18, 2022

B.C. Public Servants Facing Termination Over Vaccine Mandate Speak Out

VICTORIA – B.C. public servants facing termination due to the province’s proof of COVID-19 vaccination mandate for government workers are going public with their stories.

WATCH - BC Public Service Employees Speak Out:

- [Michelle](#) – Social Development and Poverty Reduction
- [Zoran](#) – Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development
- [M. \(name withheld\)](#) – Public Safety and Solicitor General

On November 1, 2021, the BC Public Service required all of its approximately 30,000 employees to prove their COVID-19 vaccination status by November 22 or be placed on leave with out pay for three months and then terminated.

The Head of the BC Public Service, Lori Wanamaker, at the time called the mandate “an important and necessary step to ensure our workplaces remain as safe as possible.”

BC Public Service Employees for Freedom, a group that advocates on behalf of employees affected by the mandate and who are concerned with its impacts to public services, has [written to Wanamaker](#) seeking an end to the policy before employees are terminated. The group represents a growing association of more than 450 active and experienced professionals with collectively many hundreds, if not thousands, of years of dutiful public service. Members hail from a wide range of professional backgrounds and disciplines, and include both management and regular employees.

“B.C. is now just one of a few provinces in Canada that will terminate public servants for not proving their COVID-19 vaccination status,” said the group’s

spokesperson, on condition of anonymity. “Ontario, Quebec, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba all honour their employees’ medical privacy and choice in this matter. They have determined that their employees can work safely without this requirement and we hope B.C. will allow public servants here to do the same.”

A [recent report](#) from the Institute for Research on Public Policy showed that as of February 15, only B.C., New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Yukon had vaccine mandates in place for their public servants. New Brunswick has since indicated it is [reviewing](#) its mandatory policy for government employees, and Newfoundland has said it will [drop its vaccine passport](#) by March 14.

“Today we are sharing the first personal stories of three of our brave colleagues who have agreed to come forward to tell British Columbians how this mandate is impacting services and the lives of the dedicated individuals who provide them. We look forward to sharing more stories of public servants who will be terminated in the coming days and weeks. We feel it is important that British Columbians know and understand the impact this policy is having on their province and public service.”

“Ultimately what we would like is to meet with Ms. Wanamaker and her team to find a solution that advances the interests of all concerned, including, and most importantly, the public interest.”

BC Public Service Employee Personal Stories

B.C. public servants from a wide range of professional backgrounds and government ministries have agreed to speak with BCPS Employees for Freedom Media on camera or have their audio testimony recorded. Their stories have been made into the following video clips for the public. Only employees’ first names or initials are used, and all testimonies have been prepared in accordance with the BC Public Service [Oath of Employment](#) and [Standards of Conduct](#).

Michelle - Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction

Michelle is a 14-year BC Public Service employee living in Horsefly, B.C., near Williams Lake. Beginning her career as a correctional officer, Michelle later transitioned to working as an Employment & Assistance Worker with the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction. Her work has focused on health and specialized services for clients attending treatment programs at short- and long-term care facilities. “I would think that the services have been hugely impacted by the number of people that have been put on leave,” she says, speaking about the mandatory proof of vaccination policy. “We were

already running quite short staffed. There [were] offers for overtime before so I can't imagine how much more it's impacted B.C.'s most vulnerable people." Michelle, a three-time cancer survivor and mother, is currently on leave without pay.

Zoran - Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development

[Zoran](#), a Registered Professional Forester and Senior Manager with the Mountain Resorts Branch of the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development, currently based in Kamloops, has worked in the BC Public Service for almost 26 years. He, his wife and daughter came to Canada in 1994 seeking a new life surviving civil war and ethnic strife tore apart their native Bosnia. Zoran has been proud to serve the people of B.C. for more than a quarter century. He originally found the BC Public Service values to be close to his own personal values. Now he is concerned about a shift he has seen in how people treat each other. "I want the public not to judge people based on vaccination status and accept the decision about medical treatments that are deeply private, personal choices," he says. "That would be my message to the public of British Columbia." Zoran and his wife, also a B.C. public servant, are currently on leave without pay and expect to be terminated in April.

M. - Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General

[M. \(name withheld\)](#) has been with the BC Public Service for 13 years. In her role working with the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General in Vancouver, M. supports victims of violent crime, domestic and sexual abuse survivors, those struggling with mental illness and suicidal ideation, and families who have lost loved ones. Being placed on leave without pay has had an impact on her co-workers and clients. "None of them wanted to see me go. They knew I fought hard for these victims. None of my colleagues, none of the management team wanted to see me go. For the first two months of my leave without pay, my caseload sat largely untouched. These victims waited a lot longer for help than they should have had to." M., a mother of two, expects to be terminated from the BC Public Service on February 24, 2022.

Learn More:

BCPS Employees for Freedom is a non-partisan public service employee group seeking an amicable solution on behalf of its members with their employer. The group is a growing association of more than 450 B.C. public servants from a wide range of professional backgrounds and disciplines, and includes both management and regular employees. Collectively, we have many hundreds, if

not thousands, of years of faithful public service behind us, and we look forward to performing many more. We are not protesting, but rather trying to follow the right process to resolve our current employment situation by writing and communicating with our employer, public officials and the public. We look forward to sharing many more employee stories in the coming days and weeks. We are exploring all legal options available to us, including proceeding to court to file an injunction, however we hope to avoid this if at all possible. For comment on any potential legal action on behalf of BCPS Employees for Freedom, please contact our legal counsel:

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