

A bill that would allow Arkansans to opt out of COVID-19 vaccine mandates imposed by employers is one step closer to becoming law. Members of the House Public Health, Welfare and Labor committee today (Tues) approved Senate Bill 739, sponsored by Republican Sen. Kim Hammer of Benton. It would require employers who require vaccines to provide an exemption process for people not choosing to get vaccinated. That could include weekly testing, or twice-yearly testing for immunity from the virus. But Matt Gilmore with the Arkansas Department of Health said that may not be frequent enough to ensure workers aren't inadvertently spreading COVID-19.

News01

0:18

"...and fleshed out."

Under the proposal, the cost of testing would fall on the employee if federal or state funds are not available. The bill passed on a voice vote and now goes to the full House for a final vote. Also today (Tues) the committee failed to pass a bill that would provide federal funds for unemployment payments for people who are fired for not complying with a vaccine mandate.

A bill that would provide unemployment payments to people fired for not complying with a COVID-19 vaccine mandate has failed in the Arkansas Legislature. The House Public Health, Welfare and Labor committee today (Tues) voted against Senate Bill 732, sponsored by Republican Sen. Blake Johnson of Corning. It would have provided unemployment payments funded by the federal government through the American Rescue Act, though state finance officials say rules prevent those funds from being used for that purpose. Arkansas Commerce Secretary Mike Preston said those payments would then have to come from the state's Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund, which would raise costs for businesses.

News02

0:22

"...cost, uh, to them."

The bill failed with nine lawmakers voting in favor of it, six against, and five not voting. The same committee today (Tues) passed a bill that would require employers who mandate vaccines to provide an exemption process for people not wanting to get vaccinated.