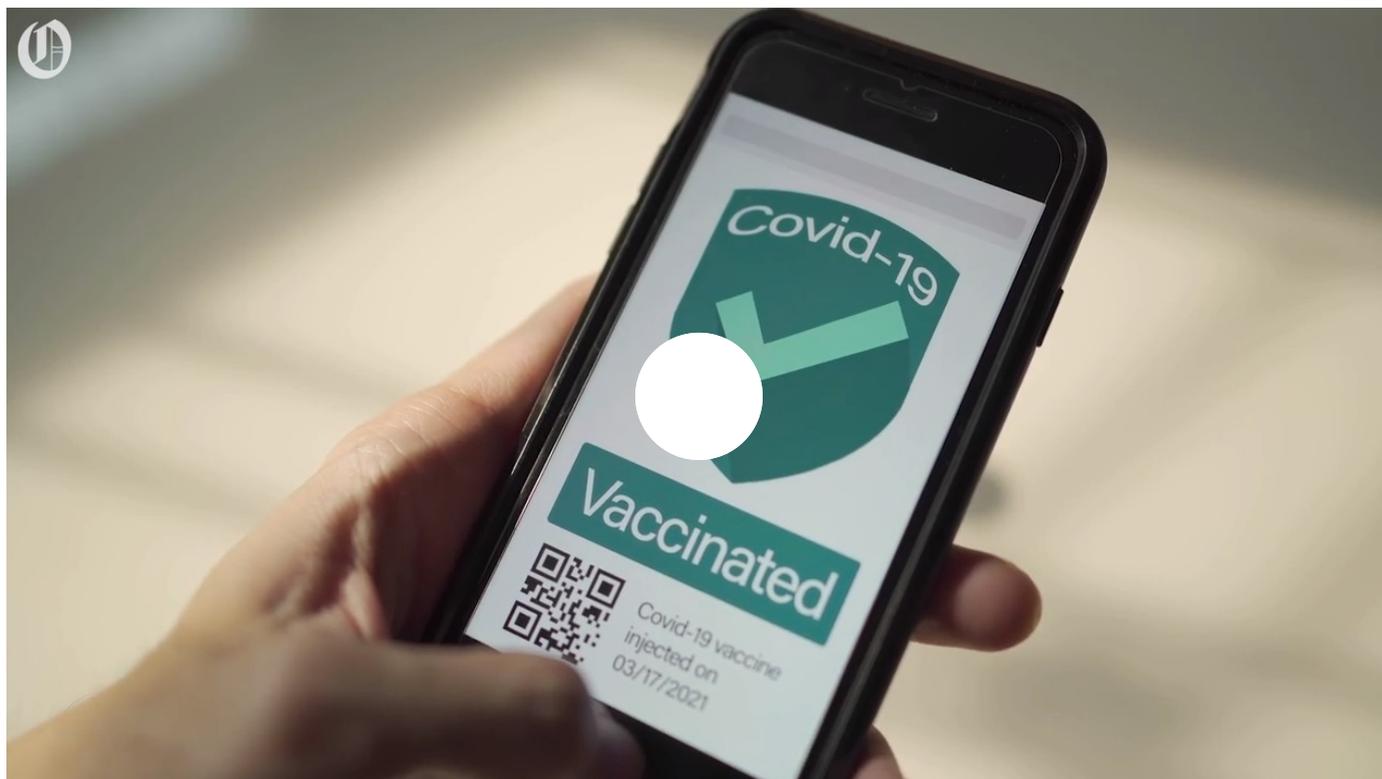


# Should state workers in NC get protections if they refuse a COVID vaccine?

[By Colin Campbell](#) May 05, 2021 02:01 PM,



'Vaccine passports': What are they and how do they work?

As more Americans receive the COVID-19 vaccine, the debate about "vaccine passports" has emerged. Here's what you should know. By Josh Bell

**RALEIGH**

Republican lawmakers want to make sure state and local government employees won't face "retaliation" if they refuse to get vaccinated against COVID-19.

[House Bill 686](#) is one of several bills filed in recent weeks aimed at banning vaccine mandates, but it's the first to get a committee hearing. It says that government workers for all state and local agencies — as well as applicants for those jobs — would have “the right to refuse any of the coronavirus vaccines without being subjected to termination or retaliation.”

The bill's sponsor, Rep. Jake Johnson, a Polk County Republican, said the measure stems from a complaint from a county administration employee (he declined to name the county) who said that their boss “heavily insinuated that if they didn't get it, they wouldn't have a job the next week.”

“We certainly don't want them to lose their jobs if they do that,” Johnson said.

But the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services has concerns about how the bill would affect its operations. DHHS Assistant Secretary Matt Gross told the House State Government Committee that “it would conflict with the federal rules for infection control at state-operated facilities.”

He explained that workers at state-run health facilities are required to have certain vaccines, although the COVID-19 vaccine won't be on that list until it gets further regulatory approvals.

Gross said another problem with the bill is appears to require state agencies to “treat every employee in our state health facilities as if they are unvaccinated.” That means that if a critical health care facility had a COVID-19 outbreak, DHHS would have to quarantine the entire staff without making exceptions for those who are fully vaccinated.

Rep. Sarah Stevens, a Surry County Republican, said she's open to “tweaks” to the bill to address the concerns about health care facilities. But she said because the legislature has a looming deadline, she wanted it to pass the

committee on Tuesday and make any changes later.

HB 686 also says that unvaccinated people couldn't be banned from entering government-owned buildings, including those on school and university campuses.

The bill passed the State Government Committee on a voice vote Wednesday morning with some dissent. It now goes to the House Health Committee.

So far, other vaccine-related bills haven't been scheduled for a committee hearing. That includes one that would ban private employers from requiring the COVID-19 vaccine, and another that would prohibit schools from requiring that students get any vaccine while also banning "forced participation in a vaccine tracking system." [No state has required people to have a "vaccine passport,"](#) The News & Observer reported, although they have records of which residents have had a COVID-19 vaccine, and some, including North Carolina, have started looking at ways people can prove their vaccinated status to anyone who asks.

Bills that haven't been scheduled at this point may be less likely to move forward, because the legislature has a self-imposed deadline next week that requires bills to pass either the House or Senate to be eligible for the remainder of the session.

Anti-vaccine protesters were at the legislature on Tuesday to urge lawmakers to hold votes on the bills.