

PRESS RELEASE



Robin Carter, Chair | Board of Commissioners

Janet Abrahams, President | Chief Executive Officer

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Housing Authority of Baltimore City Mandates Vaccine Requirement for Employees

Employees were told last month they have until September 1st to become vaccinated

(BALTIMORE | August 9, 2021) – The Housing Authority of Baltimore City (HABC) has become the first government-related agency in the city to announce a mandatory COVID-19 vaccination policy for its 650 employees. Under the policy, all employees must show proof of vaccination by September 1st unless they have been approved for a reasonable accommodation for a medical reason or sincerely held religious belief.

In announcing the mandate, HABC’s president and CEO Janet Abrahams cited the low vaccination rate among employees.

“We have spent months repeatedly stressing to our employees the importance of getting the shots, yet only about half have submitted proof of vaccination,” Abrahams said. “Now with Covid cases increasing, our Board of Commissioners and I felt compelled to protect our co-workers and the residents we serve, especially our seniors and other vulnerable clients.”

Because HABC is an independent agency, separate from the city, it can make policies that may differ from city policy. The agency will continue a mask requirement for its customer service centers.

The HABC board authorized the vaccination mandate in June. Since then, the housing authority has hosted a virtual town hall with medical experts so that employees who still had questions about the vaccine could get them answered. It has also held vaccination clinics specifically for employees, some of whom have come in for their first shot after being apprised of the mandate.

HABC has taken steps to protect residents and employees from the virus, including joining with MedStar and other partners to hold vaccination clinics at public housing sites to bring the medicine to residents where they live. The agency is also involved with a program called the Sewer Sentinel, in which technicians test the wastewater at HABC sites to look for elevated levels of Covid. If an increased level is detected, HABC immediately sets up a testing clinic for residents of that development.

In their resolution approving the vaccine mandate, the commissioners stated, “HABC has the responsibility to provide and maintain a workplace that is free of known hazards, and this policy was developed to safeguard the health of our employees and their families, our customers and visitors, our residents, and the community at large from infectious diseases that may be reduced by vaccinations.”

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All employees will be paid for time taken to receive vaccinations. Employees who do not comply by September 1st will begin a 45-day progressive discipline track, ending in termination for those who do not come into compliance. The mandate applies to HABC job applicants as well.

“We’re letting them know when they apply that they will have to be vaccinated in order to work here,” Abrahams said.

About HABC

HABC is the fifth largest public housing authority in the U.S., providing quality affordable housing for more than 23,000 households. The agency creates diverse and vibrant communities, provides opportunities for self-sufficiency, and builds pathways for strong partnerships. #bmoreHABC

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