

Senate approves bills to ban COVID-19 vaccination requirements

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The state Senate today approved a series of COVID-19 measures that backers drew up in response to vaccine mandates and other measures to combat the pandemic.

The bills would allow those who quit or are fired rather than get the vaccine to still qualify for unemployment benefits, to prohibit requiring proof of vaccination to enter a business or receive government services, and to allow a claim of natural immunity in lieu of proof of vaccination or a COVID-19 test.

Sen. Chris Larson, D-Milwaukee, accused Republicans of trying to “coddle an extremist and selfish base” with a “slew of bad bills,” which he said serve to discourage people from getting vaccinated when studies have proven it dramatically reduces the impact of contracting COVID-19 and the chances of dying from it

“There is no reason for us to spend our energy trying to coddle those who have refused it,” Larson said.

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Sen. Mary Felzkowski, one of the co-authors of the bills, countered that other countries recognize natural immunity and forcing people to get an experimental vaccine is un-American.

“Natural immunity is what’s been saving generations for years,” she said.

AB 299 would ban businesses from requiring patrons to show proof of vaccine to enter or receive services. Some businesses in the state have begun requiring patrons to show their vaccination card or a copy of it before entering. The bill also would ban the state from requiring similar proof before providing services.

AB 675 would require employees to accept documentation of natural immunity in lieu of any vaccination or testing requirement. The bill would allow chiropractors and pharmacists, along with other health professionals, to sign documentation of a positive COVID-19 or antibody test. It also would allow workers or prospective employees to provide a notarized letter stating to the best of their knowledge they have recovered from COVID-19.

Both bills passed 20-12 along party lines and now head to the gov's desk.

Under current law, those who quit their jobs generally aren't eligible for unemployment insurance. Also, those who are fired because of misconduct or substantial fault also generally can't qualify for unemployment. SB 547 would create an exemption for those who quit or are fired over a COVID-19 vaccination requirement.

The Senate also signed off on SB 721, which would allow those required by their employer to receive the COVID-19 vaccine to claim worker's compensation if they could show they were sickened by it.

Both bills passed 20-12 and now head to the Assembly.