February 23, 2022

The Honorable Buffy Wicks  
Member, California State Assembly  
State Capitol Building  
Sacramento, CA  95814

RE:  AB 1993 (Wicks) – Employment: COVID-19 vaccination requirements. (STRONG OPPOSE)

Dear Assembly Member Wicks:

The California Professional Firefighters (CPF), state council of the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF), representing over 30,000 career firefighting and emergency medical service personnel statewide, must strongly oppose AB 1993, which would create a new condition of employment by imposing a statewide vaccination mandate to be enforced by both public and private employers, regardless of previously bargained agreements and circumventing the meet and confer process.

Firefighters have been at the forefront of the response to the pandemic, providing emergency medical services in the field and supporting the health system by having crews in hospitals and other facilities at the height of the pandemic. Moreover, our members have been on the front lines responding to wildfires, mudslides and other disasters that have occurred before and during the pandemic.

CPF has been collaborative in engaging state officials to support the response to the pandemic. We have worked with policy makers on proposals to ensure worker health and safety through paid sick leave and other policy measures. Moreover, CPF has worked to educate our members on vaccination options and encouraged them to engage their local government employers on issues associated with COVID-19 safety protocols including vaccination. That engagement has resulted in locally driven solutions that represent the need of the community and their departments.

This collaboration that has occurred between my members and their employer through local bargaining and dialogue would be thrown out by AB 1993. We are dismayed that this measure undermines the strength and importance of local bargaining and labor negotiations. Over the last two years, CPF’s local affiliates, as well as the local unions for our brothers and sisters throughout the labor movement, have diligently met with their employers in good faith to discuss and bargain local COVID-19 policies and solutions. These negotiations are
part of the core of organized labor, and to summarily remove these bargained policies with a blanket mandate sets a dangerous and demoralizing precedent.

At a time when organized labor is under increasing attack from wealthy business interests and anti-labor organizations, the state of California enacting a policy that denies workers the ability to bargain with their employer over a mandate that may not only impact their employment but even cost them their job would be unconscionable. How can local labor leaders expect good faith engagement with their employers on this or future issues with the knowledge that the agreements they reach may be taken away by the state just as easily?

With a broad reach to every public and private employer throughout the state, this measure has the potential to allow any employee, including those public safety workers who have been at the frontlines of this pandemic for two years, to face discipline and even termination after having previously come to an agreement with their employer.

Regrettably, AB 1993 completely ignores locally driven engagement that has occurred since the beginning of the pandemic and tells workers in California if they want to be able to earn a living and provide for their family, they must take this vaccine.

As noted previously, CPF has taken very seriously the job of educating our firefighter members throughout California about the efficacy of the vaccine and how getting a vaccine is the best and safest way to protect them and the Californians that they are sworn to protect. CPF has joined the IAFF in strongly encouraging all firefighters and emergency medical personnel to get vaccinated, but we are strongly opposed vaccine requirements, like the mandate proposed in AB 1993, because they undercut local bargaining.

For these reasons, we must strongly oppose this measure and request that you withdraw it from consideration.

Sincerely,

Brian K. Rice
President
BKR:bt

Cc: Assemblymember Aguiar-Curry
    Assemblymember Low
    Assemblymember Quirk
    Assemblymember Stone
    Assemblymember Weber
    Senator Dodd
    Senator Newman
    Senator Pan
    Senator Wiener