

NBA Hit With Lawsuit by Referees Fired Over Refusal to Receive a COVID-19 Vaccine



The National Basketball Association (NBA) [has been sued](#) by three referees who were fired last year when they refused to receive a COVID-19 vaccine and were denied religious exemptions.

The lawsuit alleges the NBA violated the federal civil rights law and New York state and city human rights laws when it forced referees to get vaccinated or lose their jobs, and denied their religious accommodations.

In a complaint filed on Saturday in Manhattan federal court, Kenny Mauer, Mark Ayotte and Jason Phillips said the league improperly forced compliance with its “hygienic norms,” and wrongly concluded that their sincere religious objections fell short of its “high standard” against being vaccinated.

Ayotte is Catholic and [started working for the NBA](#) in 2004, according to the complaint filed in the U.S. District Court

for the Southern District of New York. Mauer, a Christian, was one of the longest-serving referees in NBA history and Phillips, a Baptist, served as an NBA referee for 19 years before being promoted to vice president of referee operations.

The referees said the NBA's "jab or job ultimatum" caused them to be suspended for the 2021-2022 season. When the league lifted its vaccine requirement for the 2022-2023 season and implemented a ban on vaccine mandates under its new seven-year collective bargaining agreement with referees, the NBA refused to reinstate Mauer, Ayotte and Phillips.

"Had the NBA not taken upon itself to force faith-based conscientious objectors to adhere to secular norms, none of plaintiffs' complained-of injuries would have manifested," the complaint said. "In sum: Plaintiffs were persecuted."