

United Airlines Will Let Unvaccinated Employees Return After Mistreating Workers



United Airlines, citing a steep decrease in COVID cases, will [allow unvaccinated workers](#) who refused to receive a COVID vaccine return to work on March 28, shifting from one of the nation's strictest COVID vaccine mandates.

In a [memo](#) sent to employees on Thursday, the Chicago-based carrier – whose largest shareholders are [Vanguard and Blackrock](#) – wrote that about 2,220 of its employees were suspended from their jobs as a means of the company providing them with “reasonable accommodations” to the COVID vaccine requirement.

“We plan to welcome back those employees who have been out on an approved [accommodation] to their normal positions starting March 28,” the memo said.

The action permits staffers with exemptions from the company's vaccination policy to return from unpaid leave or from the

non-customer-facing roles they were allowed to apply for as an alternative to their regular jobs, [the report said](#).

In other words, employees who received “reasonable accommodations” can now return to their jobs with a company that didn’t respect their bodily autonomy, [froze their 401\(k\)s](#), prohibited them from [finding other employment](#) and punished them by taking away their income simply because they refused to receive an experimental COVID vaccine.

A United official said the airline has no plans to rehire 200 employees who did not comply with the company’s mandate.

Kirk Limacher, vice president of human resources at United, said the change was due to the [drop in COVID cases](#) and related hospitalizations over a period of weeks. Many states and cities are lifting COVID restrictions, and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) eased its masking guidance, he added.

The CDC on Feb. 25 suddenly [changed its recommendations](#) on masks and social distancing, suggesting 70% of Americans could stop wearing masks and no longer need to social distance or avoid indoor crowded spaces.

The CDC broadened its criteria after an internal memo, [commissioned](#) by the Democratic Party, provided advice for dealing with COVID policy in hopes of boosting tanking poll numbers.

“These changes suggest that the pandemic is beginning to meaningfully recede. As a result, we’re confident we can safely begin the process of returning our RAP employees to their jobs,” [Limacher wrote](#). “Of course, if another variant emerges or the COVID trends suddenly reverse course, we will reevaluate the appropriate safety protocols at that time.”

United Airlines retaliated against workers who refused to get vaccinated

A captain with United Airlines on Jan. 26 said she was [put on unpaid leave](#) for refusing to comply with United's COVID vaccine mandate, saying she was locked out of her 401(k) and prohibited from finding another job.

"I am out on unpaid leave. I am prohibited from getting another job. I'm prohibited from accessing my 401(k). I have no medical benefits, and I'm leading the charge in this fight, so my days are consumed," United pilot Sherry Walker, co-founder of [Airline Employees 4 Health Freedom](#), said at a "Defeat the Mandates" march in Washington, D.C.

Sherry Walker, co-founder of [@AE4HF](#), tells [@DailySignal](#) she is a captain for United Airlines: "I am out on unpaid leave, I am prohibited from getting another job, I am prohibited from accessing my 401k, I have no medical benefits, and I'm leading the charge in this fight." pic.twitter.com/xZxUxuBk9f

– Mary Margaret Olohan (@MaryMargOlohan) [January 23, 2022](#)

Walker [told Fox Digital](#) she is considered an "active employee" even though she was put on unpaid leave for not complying with the airline's [vaccine mandate](#).

"That means that they can call us back with two weeks' notice at any given time, they can just grab us and pull us back. But because we're active, we haven't had a qualified lifestyle change," Walker said. So Schwab, which owns our 401(k) accounts, refuses to let anyone access them."

Walker said employees in similar shoes have been prohibited from finding other employment because United enforced non-

compete agreements.

“In this case, they [United Airlines] have said that no, no outside employment. In fact, you must go through ethics and compliance, and it can’t be a company that we could have ... a non-compete” with,” Walker said.

Even if Walker could get another job with an airline, she can’t make lateral moves as a captain because the airline industry has a seniority-based system. She would have to start at the bottom with probationary pay and work her way back up to a six-figure salary.

“You start over at the bottom. I can’t be a captain at any other airline in this country. I go back from my six-figure salary, back down to starting probationary pay ... pulling gear for some captain,” Walker said.

“While we believe our employer has the right to have a mandate, they are obligated under Title VII to give us reasonable accommodations,” she added. “And right now we’re fighting in the Fifth Circuit Court in New Orleans to wait a judgment to see if we will succeed in a preliminary injunction or if we will continue on the unreasonable accommodation of indefinite unpaid leave.”

Walker said she’s concerned that if United is allowed to take away bodily autonomy over a COVID vaccine, a dangerous precedent will be set.

“Now it’s just a shot in the arm,” Walker said, but what could happen in a few years if I’m potentially diagnosed with a disease such as breast cancer and they want me to have a double mastectomy instead of a little radiation so I can return to work as fast as possible?

Walker said if she [refused such a request](#), her employer could fire back that she already gave over her bodily autonomy, so she doesn’t have a say anymore.

Sen. Cruz slams United CEO over disgraceful treatment of unvaccinated employees

During a [Senate Commerce Committee hearing](#), Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) on Dec. 16, confronted United CEO Kirby over the airline's COVID vaccine mandate.

"United's behavior on this issue has been deeply disturbing," Cruz said. "The way United has treated its employees is in marked contrast to your competitors who said they will stand with their employees."

Kirby admitted during the hearing United had fired six pilots, placed 80 pilots on unpaid leave and fired more than 200 employees for refusing to comply with the mandate. Cruz said he received notice that more than 2,000 employees had been placed on unpaid leave and he was "appalled by the callous disregard for the rights of the pilots."

Cruz said he received a message from a pilot who flew for United Airlines for over two decades, who applied for and received an exemption to the company's vaccine mandate on religious grounds, yet was subsequently placed on leave with no pay or benefits, including medical insurance.

"Now the wife of the pilot who relies on her husband's medical insurance had to postpone a necessary procedure and has no idea when he will be able to work again," Cruz said. "You are simultaneously enforcing a non-compete so this pilot can't even go work with your competitors."

Another pilot flew for the Air Force for three decades and found himself on indefinite unpaid leave with a denial of all

benefits including dental, medical and disability. He too was denied access to his retirement savings.

A ten-year flight attendant and single mother was fired via a termination notice tied to her front gate.

Cruz called out Kirby and noted for the record that employees were suing the company for the ill-treatment they received for exercising their constitutional rights. Kirby said the company treated their employees like trash for their own safety.

United Airlines was first to punish employees who refused experimental COVID vaccines

United Airlines was one of the [first major U.S. employers](#) to mandate COVID vaccines for its employees. The company imposed a COVID vaccine requirement for its 67,000 U.S. workforce in August.

Workers could apply for religious or medical exemptions but were punished for doing so. If such an exemption request was deemed reasonable, the worker was placed on indefinite unpaid leave instead of being allowed to continue in their job. They were also prohibited from finding other employment.

This policy even applied to those with [natural immunity](#) – who were not a risk to others or themselves.

United CEO [Scott Kirby told workers](#) “to be very careful about” requesting accommodations and said workers were putting their jobs on the line if they did.

United’s response triggered a lawsuit, which is currently navigating its way through the lower courts. In a February [ruling](#), a federal appeals court said United’s mandate was “actively coercing employees to abandon their convictions,”

and ordered a new review of the lower court decision not to block United from enforcing its employee vaccine mandate.

United is now arguing the issue is moot.