

Woman Awarded Nearly \$700K After Being Fired For Refusing To Comply With COVID Vaccine Mandate



A Tennessee woman has been awarded nearly \$700,000 after a jury found that her employer wrongfully terminated her for refusing to comply with the company's COVID-19 vaccine mandate.

Tanya Benton, a former research scientist at BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee (BCBST), was awarded \$687,000 damages, including \$177,000 in back pay, \$10,000 in compensatory damages, and \$500,000 in punitive damage after a [federal jury found](#) she had “proved by a preponderance of the evidence” that her decision to refuse to get vaccinated was based on a “sincerely held religious belief.”

Benton was terminated from her position in 2021 after she refused to receive the COVID-19 vaccine—and the company denied her religious exemption. She then filed a lawsuit against her

former employer, arguing that the termination violated her rights.

Benton worked at BCBST from 2005 through November 2022, primarily as a biostatistical research scientist. According to the lawsuit, her job did not include regular contact with people. She only interacted with 10 to 12 clients each year, and some of those encounters were not even in person. At the time the company's mandate was imposed, Benton had been working from home for more than a year and a half.

When BCBST implemented its mandate, Benton submitted a request for a religious exemption, but the company denied it and told her she could not keep her job unless she rolled up her sleeve.

Benton believes COVID-19 vaccines are derived from aborted fetal cell lines (which is absolutely true), and she "cannot in good conscience" get vaccinated because it "would not only defile her body but also anger and dishonor God."

When her religious exemption was denied, she appealed and was reportedly told there were no exceptions for anyone with her job title, even though she didn't interact with people or patients in her role. Ultimately, Benton was fired.

[Dalya Qualls White](#), senior vice president and chief communications officer for BlueCross, said Monday the company was disappointed by the jury's decision, but declined to say whether the decision would be appealed.

"We believe the vaccine requirement was the best decision for the health and safety of our employees, members, and wider community given the circumstances and federal guidance in effect at the time," White said. "We appreciate our former employees' service to our members and communities throughout their time with our company."

As reported by [The Vault Project](#), Pfizer, Moderna, Johnson &

Johnson, and AstraZeneca all used aborted fetuses for the research, development, or manufacturing of their shots. In addition, any vaccine that used aborted fetal cell lines during manufacturing, like the J&J vaccine, contained residual cells, DNA, or proteins from an aborted baby.

The Vault Project also dispelled the myth that only two aborted fetal cell lines have been used to find the “ideal” cell line, and vaccines are fueling an industry that relies upon the continuous production of new cell lines.

In late 2021, BlueCross instituted a policy requiring employees to be vaccinated against COVID-19 unless they had a religious or medical exemption. Despite resistance from Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee and others, the insurer maintained that, as a federal contractor, it was bound to adhere to a White House directive mandating all employees be vaccinated by December 8, 2021.

“We believe our accommodation to the vaccine requirement complied with the law,” BlueCross spokesperson Alison Sexter said in a statement Monday.

According to Benton’s attorney, Doug S. Hamill, Blue Cross terminated 19 employees in October 2021 for refusing to comply with its vaccine mandate. In November 2021, 22 more Blue Cross workers lost their jobs shortly before the state passed a law to prevent Blue Cross from proceeding with the mandate.

“From the beginning of these forced vaccination campaigns, the position of BlueCross and BlueShield of Tennessee was clear: no jab, no job,” Hamill said. “Religious exemptions were ignored, and no attempt was made to retain these employees, some of whom served BCBST for more than two decades.”

According to [Vanderbilt University](#), most major religions have no theological objection to vaccination, including Catholics, Orthodox Christians, the Amish, Anglicans, Baptists, Mormons, and Methodists.

The university decided that six denominations, including Dutch Reformed Congregations, Faith Tabernacle, Church of the First Born, Faith Assembly, and End Time Ministries, do have theological objections.

However, Vanderbilt University, which receives substantial funding from the Department of Health and Human Services and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, is wrong.

Your [religious denomination is irrelevant](#) to your ability to hold a sincerely held religious belief that would prevent you from receiving a COVID-19 vaccine, and if you have a sincerely held religious belief, you're entitled to accommodation regardless of your denomination under federal law.

BCBTS made no accommodation for Benton, who is a nondenominational Christian, and now they're on the hook for almost \$700,000. This case could set a precedent for other cases and will hopefully prevent companies in the future from being quick to impose a vaccine mandate—and if they do, more cautious about denying someone's religious exemption.