



Michael Preston
Secretary of Commerce,
Executive Director
Arkansas Economic
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VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

April 14, 2021

Senator Cecile Bledsoe
Chairman
Senate Public Health, Welfare & Labor Committee
1 Capitol Mall, Fifth Floor
Little Rock, AR 72201

Re: SB615

Dear Chairman Bledsoe:

Today in the Senate Public Health, Welfare, & Labor Committee the senator sponsoring SB615 made the following remarks in his presentation of the bill:

Secretary Preston is pushing [Commerce employees] to get vaccinated in order to keep employment. Now that's an unverified claim from somebody in a text message that I trust.

I want to assure you and the other members of the committee that this statement is simply not true. At no time have I or anyone on the Commerce leadership team pressured anyone to get vaccinated in order to remain employed. I do believe it is good for as many people as possible to be vaccinated, and we have arranged for vaccination clinics to be held for Commerce employees to make that easier for them. However, I believe it is the choice of each employee as to whether or not to be vaccinated. Had the senator chosen to contact me directly, I would have assured him of that fact.

I am incredibly proud of all the hard work by the employees of the Department of Commerce over this past year. They have worked countless hours at great sacrifice to their families. Several have passed away as a result of COVID-19. Inaccurate statements such as those made by the senator only serve to create confusion and more stress for our employees. That's why I thought it important to write you and set the record straight.

I would ask that you share this letter with the other members of the committee so that they know that what was said was not true. I am happy to appear before the committee and testify to that effect as well.

Sincerely,

Michael Preston
Secretary, Department of Commerce