

# 7 Mass. cops who refused vaccine mandate can return to work with back pay, arbitrator rules

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Seven Massachusetts state troopers who were suspended as a result of Massachusetts' state vaccine mandate can return to work with back pay, following the ruling of an arbitrator.

The ruling, by arbitrator Bonnie J. McSpirtt, also covers an eighth trooper who had returned to duty after seeking a religious exemption to the mandate, according to a release from the [State Police Association of Massachusetts](#), the state police's union.

The ruling represents the completion of about two years of legal fighting over the suspensions, according to Association President Patrick McNamara.

"Through this lengthy and grueling grievance and arbitration process, the Association has remained steadfast in our fight to right the injustices of the (Charlie) Baker Administration," McNamara wrote in a release.

According to union spokesman Chris Keohan, the seven officers are:

- Paul Aten of the commercial vehicle enforcement section;
- Jessie Barbosa, a community liaison for the Community Action Team for Troop D, covering the South Shore and Cape and Islands;
- Christopher Dolan, who worked for crime scene services in Springfield;
- David Hanafin of the Special Tactical Operations Team in Andover;
- Joseph Hanafin of the mounted unit;
- Patrick Irwin, a defensive tactics instructor at the State Police Academy in New Braintree;
- Lance Reed of the Framingham barracks.

Whether they return to work, the officers are eligible for back pay from the day they were suspended to the day they received notice they could return following the arbiter's ruling on Friday.

The final officer — who already returned to work — is Luke Bonin, a homicide trooper in Bristol, who is also the vice president of the state trooper's union. Bonin is eligible for back pay like the other officers.

All of the eight officers were found to have sincerely held religious beliefs that the arbiter found should have exempted them from the state's vaccine mandate, known as Executive Order 595.

"Executive Order 595 was more than just an affront to the hard-working members of the Mass State Police, it was an attack on organized labor and the rights of our members," McNamara said. "Governor Baker and his administration refused to listen or work with our Association, but today we can no longer be ignored."

The same arbitration denied the union's position that the state discriminated against 156 other officers that it denied requests that they had sincerely held religious beliefs. Those officers did not testify to prove they had those beliefs, according to the arbitrator.

The distinction for the other eight officers, according to the arbitration, was that they were found to have sincerely held religious belief, but were not accommodated by the department.

The Massachusetts Legislature is engaged in [another debate over religious exemptions to vaccine mandates](#), this one in schools.