

September 26, 2021**Immediate Release****Contact:** JoAnn Cavanaugh, Director Public Relations**Office:** (716) 706-2061 | **Cell:** (716) 228-4886 | **Email:** jcav@chsbuffalo.org

Statement Regarding COVID-19 Vaccine Mandate

With hours left to go before the New York State COVID-19 Vaccine Mandate goes into effect, Catholic Health personnel have until 9:00 p.m. tonight to file a religious exemption or be vaccinated in order to work after the September 27, 2021 deadline. As of this afternoon, 90% of those covered by the mandate are in compliance with the order.

Catholic Health leaders have been working around the clock to assess the number of vaccinated individuals along with those who have filed medical exemptions and deferrals or religious exemptions to determine its staffing levels for the coming week. With a focus on maintaining emergency and critical care services, and out of an abundance of caution, the health system is postponing some elective surgeries tomorrow as it gathers a final count of the staff not eligible to work after Monday's deadline.

"We implemented an aggressive education campaign, including having our infectious disease specialists and other vaccine advocates go unit to unit and department to department, to address any questions or concerns our staff had about the COVID-19 vaccine," said William Pryor, Catholic Health Executive Vice President & Chief Administrative Officer. "Several hundred individuals were vaccinated in the last week alone and we are grateful to all those who stepped up to protect themselves and our patients and long term care residents."

After tomorrow, any unvaccinated Catholic Health personnel covered by the mandate who have not received a medical exemption or deferral or requested a religious exemption, will be placed on an unpaid leave of absence for 30 days, after which time they will be subject to termination unless they meet the requirements of the mandate. Catholic Health will place all requests for religious accommodations on hold as providers across New York await a final ruling on whether the state can exclude religious exemptions in its mandate, which is expected on or before October 12, 2021.

"We want to thank Governor Hochul and the New York State Department of Health for the support they are providing to hospitals, nursing homes, and their healthcare heroes across the state during this challenging time, as we respond to this critical issue," Catholic Health President & CEO Mark Sullivan added. "Catholic Health will continue to be there for our community, minimizing any disruption in services, while we comply with the mandate."