

August 19, 2021

Thank you, members of the State Board of Health, for calling this emergency meeting and taking the time to read my statement.

My name is Zelalem Bogale. I am an attorney and former Deputy General Counsel at the Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE), but I write to you today as an educator.

This will be my fifth year teaching at the University of Nevada, Reno, which means I taught in-person before COVID and remotely during COVID. One of the two classes I teach covers race, racism, and the law. It relies heavily on class participation and discussion to confront some of the ugliest episodes and events in American history, like slavery, the Chinese Exclusion Act, and Jim Crow.

For two and a half semesters, I have seen up close and have attempted to navigate the challenges posed by remote teaching and learning—distractions of all kinds, the lack of accountability and engagement that distance creates, technical issues with communication, among many others. I'd like to think I was able to adequately adapt to the remote format without lowering the quality of pedagogy. But whether I adequately adapted or not, I know one thing for certain: there is no substitute for teaching and learning in person, even for college students. In my experience, students tend to learn less and less efficiently than usual in a remote format. **Physical presence matters.**

Without question, NSHE's shift to remote instruction was necessary in the Spring 2020, Fall 2020, and Spring 2021 semesters to protect NSHE students, faculty, and staff. We were still learning about the virus and we didn't yet have a vaccine.

But now, while medical and public health experts continue to study the nature, effects, and variations of the virus, one life-saving development has occurred: **we now have a vaccine.**

Medical experts agree that the vaccine is the most effective way to protect the health and safety of those around us. The vaccine is also the most effective way to ensure critically important in-person instruction proceeds uninterrupted during the Fall 2021 semester and beyond.

Having already mandated vaccinations for NSHE students against other communicable diseases (e.g., MMR), the roadmap to add mandatory vaccination against COVID-19 (with the same limited exceptions) should not be difficult to follow. The reasoning for such a mandate shouldn't be either. As a recent article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* noted, "college is a more contagious environment than most. Students live, play, and learn closely together."

Imagine an unvaccinated student at a NSHE institution contracting the Delta variant during this upcoming semester and unwittingly spreading the virus to other students. Imagine looking back at this moment, this meeting. Imagine looking back at this moment, this meeting, and wondering why you as a Board did not mandate vaccination against COVID-19. Would any explanation suffice?

With classes beginning August 23, **it is imperative that the Board act now and require all NSHE students to be vaccinated against COVID-19 as a condition of enrollment to ensure a safe, productive, and meaningful Fall 2021 semester.** Now is the time to do the right thing.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Zelalem Bogale, Esq.