

BOSTON

First responders rally against vaccine mandate

By Chris Van Buskirk

Less than two weeks before the deadline for City of Boston employees to receive a first COVID-19 shot, first responders took to the State House Wednesday to urge the Wu administration to find a compromise that does not include a mandate.

The Boston mandate comes amid a COVID-19 surge, with officials reporting 16,621 confirmed cases on Tuesday and a seven-day average 21.62% positivity rate.

Both health, state, and Boston officials have said the vaccine is the best way to combat the virus, including the more contagious omicron variant, along with masking in indoor spaces.

The vaccine requirement for Boston employees is a condition of employment, which means employees could be fired if they do not get jabbed or receive a medical or religious exemption.

The mandate sets a Jan. 15 deadline for a first shot and a second shot by Feb. 15. Workers cannot opt into weekly testing in lieu of vaccination.

Also, all persons entering indoor public spaces in Boston will be required to show proof of vaccination starting Jan. 15. At the rally outside the State House, people carried signs saying “masks don’t save lives” and “they actually hinder your own breathing.”

Rallygoers started chanting “Wu has no heart” while a band sang “no more mandates” to a grungy tune. Boston First Responders United, the organizer of the rally, argues the mandate infringes upon personal civil and workers’ rights.

BFRU President Shana Cottone said now is not the time to be taking firefighters,

cops, and EMTs off the street.

“Making it that we either get the vaccine or we lose our jobs is not how we’re going to stop this pandemic,” Cottone said. “We need to find a middle ground, a compromise that actually does stop COVID and also ensures that all of our city services are fully staffed because you are going to compound the problem of a pandemic with quality of life issues.”