

Florida suspends health official who urged staff to get vaccinated



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Orlando, January 20 (RHC)-- A top Florida public health official has been put on administrative leave as officials investigate whether he violated a state ban by e-mailing employees about their low vaccination rate against COVID-19 and urging them to get shots.

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, a Republican widely believed to be planning a run for the U.S. presidency, signed a law in November banning schools, businesses and government entities from

requiring vaccination against COVID-19, drawing condemnation from health experts and Democratic leaders.

The official placed on leave, Dr. Raul Pino, the Florida Department of Health's director in Orlando, sent his staff an e-mail on January 4th noting their low vaccination rate and urging them to get shots, according to Orlando's WFTV. Dr. Pino had an analyst pull vaccination data for his employees, WFTV reported.

The Florida Department of Health said it was conducting an inquiry to determine if any laws were broken. "As the decision to get vaccinated is a personal medical choice that should be made free from coercion and mandates from employers, the employee in question has been placed on administrative leave," the department said in a statement.

In the January 4th e-mail, Pino said he had pulled vaccination data for his 568 active employees, and that less than half had two doses while only 14% had their booster, according to WFTV. "I am sorry but in the absence of reasonable and real reasons it is irresponsible not to be vaccinated," Dr. Pino wrote.

Florida was among several conservative-led states who sued the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration to stop it from enforcing a now-defunct vaccine mandate for large businesses put in place by President Joe Biden.

The Supreme Court last week blocked that mandate -- a policy the conservative justices deemed an improper imposition on the lives and health of many Americans -- while endorsing a separate federal vaccine requirement for health care facilities.

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