# NOTICE OF GOVERNMENT CLAIM

August 14, 2026

Sent via U.S. Mail and Electronic Mail

**Desert Community Health District**
1140 N. Indian Canyon Drive
Palm Springs, CA 92262
Donna Craig, Interim CEO: dcraig@dhcd.org
Andrea Hayles, Special Asst. to the CEO: ahayles@dhcd.org

**RE: Chris Christensen v. Desert Community Health District**
**Notice of Claim Pursuant to Government Code § 900 *et seq.***

To the Desert Community Health District:

This office represents your former employee Chris Christensen (hereafter referred to as "Claimant"). You are hereby notified that Claimant assert damages against the Desert Community Health District as follow.

1. Claimant's **date of birth:** June 21, 1961

2. Claimants' **address**: c/o Megan Beaman-Jacinto, Beaman Jacinto Law P.C., 77564 Country Club Drive, Suite 340, Palm Desert, CA 92211.

3. Claimants' **phone number** is c/o Beaman Jacinto Law PC: 760-698-9626.

4. The **amount of damages** to date exceeds $10,000 and **jurisdiction** over this claim rests in California superior court and/or federal district court.

5. **Place and circumstances of injury**:
   In and around the headquarters, worksites, offices, and electronic communications of the Desert Community Health District, 1140 N. Indian Canyon Drive, Palm Springs, CA 92262.

6. **Particular action (inaction) of public employees causing injury**:

DCHD hired Mr. Chris Christensen initially in 2014 as a controller and steadily promoted him to CFO, CAO, and CEO positions in recognition of his outstanding performance and contributions to the organization. Mr. Christensen was also appointed by DCHD to serve as Interim CEO *thrice* (2016, 2019, 2023), between the departure of past CEOs and the hire of their replacements. Among Mr. Christensen's numerous accomplishments with DCHD were his role in the 2018 district expansion, which doubled the DCHD service area; the 2024 Measure AA hospital lease negotiations, the 2026 design and approval of the DCHD 2027-2031 strategic plan, and more.

In 2023, DCHD initiated an investigation of then-CEO, Conrado Barzaga[1], regarding unethical and potentially illegal conflicts of interest and other conduct. Mr. Christensen provided extensive information and documentation during this investigation at the request of District legal counsel. As the investigation was underway, Barzaga began to make false and disparaging comments in public, to grantees, and to others that Mr. Christensen and Program Director Donna Craig (both white) were exercising prejudice in their disbursement of grant monies by circumventing Latino-serving organizations. This untrue allegation was harmful to Mr. Christensen's reputation as a person of high ethics and integrity and was absolutely belied by the DCHD grant and service statistics. Ultimately, the DCHD board voted 4-3 to terminate Barzaga. Directors Kimberly Barraza, Leticia De Lara, and Carmena Zavala[2] opposed the termination, despite clear evidence of unethical and potentially unlawful conduct. Mr. Christensen observed by the actions and comment of Barraza and De Lara in particular that they appeared to blame him for Barzaga's termination.

During the ensuing recruitment period for the CEO position, De Lara said in a board discussion about the position posting that she wanted the new CEO to be Latino/Hispanic and Spanish-speaking, and requested that the job announcement contain this requirement. Mr. Christensen, knowing this to be a discriminatory job requirement, questioned her statement, saying that a non-Latino/Hispanic candidate could also be qualified for the job, but the best candidate should be selected.

After it was posted, Mr. Christensen applied for the CEO position. DCHD selected Mr. Christensen as one of two finalists for the position, but the second round of interviews was delayed for more than a month. As a result, the second finalist withdrew, leaving Mr. Christensen as the only finalist. Even so, and despite that Mr. Christensen was currently serving as Interim CEO for the third time (in addition to his CAO duties), DCHD board members attempted to invite back candidates who had already been excluded and even to reopen the process.  Mr. Christensen believed that he was being disfavored in the process due to his race (non-Latino/Hispanic) as well as his cooperation with the investigation of Barzaga's potentially unlawful and unethical conduct.

Nonetheless, Mr. Christensen spoke with DCHD board president at the time, Evett PerezGil, as well as district legal counsel, requesting that the Board make a decision on the position, rather than leaving him in ongoing limbo with double duties to perform. A series of special meetings were scheduled to confirm a decision about the CEO hire.  However, the board members who had voted to not terminate past CEO Barzaga consistently came up absent shortly before the scheduled meetings, causing a lack of quorum.  These actions appeared to be intentional delays of the process.

Ultimately, after substantial delay, the DCHD board voted 5-1 to hire Mr. Christensen, with De Lara opposed, and Barraza absent.  Following his hire as CEO, Mr. Christensen experienced numerous rewards, but faced numerous challenges, particularly with respect to his relationship with certain DCHD board members.

Mr. Christensen's final 2024-2025 performance review, which gathered all board members' input, was overall very positive.  However, Barraza provided unsubstantiated negative comments in the evaluation, questioning *Mr. Christensen's* ethics and integrity, claiming also without foundation that he was biased in his interactions with constituencies.  Mr. Christensen pleaded for more detail about these accusations or any evidence to support them, but DCHD refused to provide it.

In October 2025, Mr. Christensen met with DCHD board president Carole Rogers and vice president Greg Rodriguez for a mid-year evaluation.  Ms. Rogers and Mr. Rodriguez both offered all positive feedback and gave no indication of board dissatisfaction aside from Barraza's negative comments.

In December 2025, Ms. Barraza was elected president of the DCHD board as part of the board's annual rotation of the roles.  Given her demonstrated animosity toward Mr. Christensen, he anticipated that she would take any opportunity to criticize and attack him in her new role.

True to form, shortly after her appointment, Barraza began emailing various directives to Mr. Christensen without input from the rest of the board, and in violation of DCHD board policies prohibiting presidents from these actions. Mr. Christensen responded respectfully, copying district legal counsel, citing the applicable board policy (BOD-02, Section 2.4). In response, Barraza contacted Mr. Christensen by phone in an aggressive and confrontational manner. Shortly following these exchanges, district legal counsel sent a memo to all board members and Mr. Christensen reminding the members that supervision and/or direction of the CEO by individual board members could be determined to be harassment of a public employee.

In March 2026, Barraza and Rodriguez (as board president and vice president) met with Mr. Christensen ostensibly to provide his mid-year evaluation. DCHD prohibited Mr. Christensen from recording the meeting. In stark contrast to the prior reviews, Barraza said that she would reserve her feedback and comments until the final annual evaluation, refused to provide any direction for Mr. Christensen, and instructed other attendees in the review meeting, including the District's legal counsel, Jeffrey Scott, that they were not allowed to comment or provide feedback to Mr. Christensen. Mr. Christensen expressed his concern that Barraza was retaliating and discriminating against him in her actions and communications. DCHD took no action to further inquire, much less investigate or remedy, the retaliation that Mr. Christensen reported.

DCHD then substantially and intentionally delayed Mr. Christensen's final annual evaluation for the 2025-2026 time period, departing even from the timeline for evaluation established by counsel, Barraza and the Board.

On May 7, 2026, board member Dr. Daniel Logsdon called Mr. Christensen to warn him about a possible investigation of Mr. Christensen, without providing any detail of the reason for the investigation. Logsdon further told Mr. Christensen that his evaluation would be presented soon, and that he was not allowed to respond negatively to the evaluation nor speak negatively about Barraza when he received it. Logsdon stated or implied that Mr. Christensen would be terminated if he were to do so.

Following several delayed and rescheduled meetings, on May 22, 2026, DCHD legal counsel informed Mr. Christensen that two of the three members of the ad hoc committee assigned to conduct his evaluation approved release of the evaluation and were recommending the full 5% salary increase and one-year extension to his employment contract. However, Barraza missed the subcommittee meeting, and her approval as a committee member was still required, leaving the evaluation still incomplete. Moreover, Rodriguez, one of three members of the ad hoc committee, was leaving the country for 3 weeks on

May 25, 2026, which would further extend the conclusion of the evaluation to the Board meeting on June 23, 2026.

On May 26, 2026, two months after the evaluation process began, Mr. Christensen made a public comment at the public DCHD board meeting regarding the delayed performance evaluation, emphasizing as well that ethics and integrity were important in the evaluation process, and that he was feeling harassed as a public employee. Following his public comment, the board moved into closed session. The closed session agenda included an item regarding Mr. Christensen's performance review, which had been intended to allow for him to meet with the Board to conclude his performance evaluation. However, because there was no performance review ready, he was not invited into the closed session meeting. When the board came back to open session, DCHD legal counsel informed Mr. Christensen that his employment of 12 years was being immediately terminated.

Ultimately, DCHD never gave Mr. Christensen a 2026 performance review. However, board members *did* provide to DCHD legal counsel their individual reviews for incorporation into a consolidated review document which was meant to include input from the full board. These documents indicate a substantial difference in the comments, goals, and input provided by Ms. Barraza, as compared to all other board members, in that Barraza's input was again overwhelmingly vague and negative and appeared to have been written with the assistance of AI.

The facts leading to Mr. Christensen's termination indicate that DCHD subjected him to increasingly negative terms and conditions of employment in retaliation for his reports of and cooperation in the investigation of potentially illegal activity by Barzaga, for his opposition to race discrimination in hiring, for his reports of unethical conduct by Barraza that he reasonably believed to be unlawful, for his exercise of his first amendment rights to speech, and due to his non-Latino race. In addition, DCHD's actions were designed to intentionally intimidate Mr. Christensen in retaliation for his exercise of his rights, and in an attempt to prevent him from further exercising his rights.

Following the termination of Mr. Christensen's employment, he made numerous Public Records Act requests to DCHD for documents he knows to exist, related to his employment and other subjects. DCHD has consistently delayed response to the requests, in some cases, far beyond the statutory deadlines and has indicated in many cases—falsely—that known public documents responsive to his requests do not exist.

As a result of the conduct described herein, Mr. Christensen has suffered and continues to suffer substantial damages, including economic damages in the form of lost income and benefits, as well as emotional damages, including symptoms of depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, loneliness, fear, post-traumatic stress, guilt, and more.

We welcome your proactive acceptance of this claim and any and all actions toward its resolution.

Sincerely,

Megan Beaman Jacinto
Attorney for Claimant, Chris Christensen