

**The Desert Sun**

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## **Desert Hot Springs Police Chief Dan Bressler on leave**



(Photo: Crystal Chatham/The Desert Sun)

DESERT HOT SPRINGS – Police Chief Dan Bressler has been on medical leave for more than two weeks and will remain so for an undetermined amount of time, leaving Jim Neujahr, a former police chief from Calexico, in charge of the department.

Neujahr, who lives in Calexico, was originally hired March 26 to serve as a commander for the Desert Hot Springs Police Department.

“I didn’t expect the position to morph into this,” Neujahr said during a City Council meeting last week. “I have been ordered not to exceed 29 hours a week so I’m trying to use that time in the most appropriate way.”

The police department has been in the public spotlight since December when city leaders, facing the threat of insolvency, declared a fiscal emergency and opted to cut most police salaries by more than 22 percent. In response, the police union sued.

Wendell Phillips, an attorney representing the police union, said he believes the city’s actions were illegal and in violation of state employee laws. Phillips, who also is a former law enforcement officer, said previously that he does not believe the city, “can afford to pay for the level of protection they are getting now from the police department.”

To date, former chief Kate Singer, two high-ranking commanders and at least three others have left the department.

Desert Hot Springs needs at least 32 officers strictly dedicated to patrol to effectively police the city, according to a California Commission on Peace Officers Standard and Training report released in August. The city has 22 police officers and at least 10 in the hiring process, Bressler said previously.

City leaders have also asked the Riverside County Sheriff’s Department for a bid on contract services. A sheriff’s contract for services would essentially disband the city’s police department. To date, an estimate for services from the sheriff’s department has not been received, said Mayor Pro Tem Russell Betts.

According to a report in the Imperial Valley Press, Neujahr retired from the chief’s position in Calexico a month after a vote of no confidence was submitted to the Calexico City Council from the Calexico Police Officers Association.

Mayor Adam Sanchez said he was not sure when the chief’s leave started, or exactly when he will return to his position. An email sent by Bressler and forwarded to city officials announcing his medical leave was dated April 9.

On Monday, Acting City Manager Martin Magaña said he was not sure when Bressler would be able to return.

