



## Suit claims ex-city manager wrongly forced workers out

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By WES WOODS II / The Press-Enterprise

Former Desert Hot Springs Police Chief Roy Hill and two former city employees have filed a lawsuit against the city, claiming wrongful termination.

In the lawsuit, Hill states that former City Manager Jerry Hanson fired him last March because he spoke with a Riverside County grand jury, the county district attorney's office and the FBI about activities by Hanson that might have violated state law, according to the lawsuit.

Those possible violations, according to the lawsuit, included the city manager's compensation package, land deals, city employment contracts and possible conflicts of interest. The lawsuit also cites "certain" council members and city employees' fraudulent employment filings.

The lawsuit was filed on Feb. 27 in Riverside County Superior Court.

"In my view, this is a classic whistle-blower case," attorney James Mangione, who represents all three plaintiffs, said in a telephone interview from San Diego.

Hill and the other plaintiffs had previously filed claims against the city but they were never acknowledged, Mangione said.

Kathy Ward, former manager of Desert Hot Springs Development Services, and Laurie Scully, former head of Human Resources, also claim in the lawsuit that a hostile work environment forced them to leave their positions last year after they spoke to the grand jury, district attorney and FBI.

All three seek damages for back pay, loss of future wages and benefits, past and continuing emotional distress and legal fees.

Desert Hot Springs Acting City Manager John Soulliere said he could not comment about the lawsuit. City Attorney Toni Eggebraaten did not return a phone message seeking comment.

Hanson, who is under investigation by several agencies, also declined to comment when reached by phone Monday.

Hanson resigned in August. Ann Marie Gallant, currently the city manager of King City, was named Desert Hot Springs' city manager on Feb. 28. Gallant is expected to begin her position on May 1.

In November, Hanson filed a claim against Desert Hot Springs and several city officials including Patricia "Corky" Larson in November.

The City Council voted to deny the claim.

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