

Desert Hot Springs police morale low, survey shows

Leaders call poll a political move

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Written by

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DESERT HOT SPRINGS — Desert Hot Springs police officers have low morale and are losing trust in their management, according to a Desert Hot Springs Police Officers' Association survey released Tuesday.

But the survey results were quickly dismissed by city and police department leaders, who called it an unfair political strategy by “certain union members” aiming to hurt the organization.

The findings landed one week after Officer Paul Tapia, the police union's president, told residents and media he was being disciplined for filing a complaint against a former sergeant.

The two-page survey asked officers six questions and for a vote of confidence on each of the top-ranking officers. Seventeen of 26 officers filled it out.

It also asked officers to rank Chief Patrick Williams, Cmdr. Dan Bressler and Cmdr. Kate Singer on a scale of 1 to 5 for their accountability, character, integrity, leadership and officer concern.

All but one of the officers said the department has a problem with low officer morale, and 15 of the 17 answered “yes” that trust has diminished between management and officers.

The anonymous survey, which was mailed to officers Jan. 28, was conducted by Lavell Communications.

“The headache that they've got here is that trust is at such a low ebb and the communications are at such a deteriorated state, there's really no way out of it,” CEO Jeffrey Monical said.

Monical said he runs an independent consulting and survey company that regularly works with police unions, including for nearly 20 years with the Los Angeles County sheriff's deputies union.

In a statement issued later Tuesday, Williams said he holds his officers “in the highest regard” and encourages “open, honest and healthy” dialogue.

The public release of the survey results “represents the influence of politics that has seeped into our department and promoted by some union members who are using big-city labor tactics to harm our organization,” Williams wrote.

City Manager Rick Daniels called Williams a dedicated and professional chief who has won “the overwhelming support” of the community.

Daniels also pointed to the statewide award Williams won for his community policing initiatives and an ethical courage award he won from the California Police Officers' Association last spring.

“We're fortunate to have a police chief of this caliber,” Daniels said. “He has raised the bar in terms of what is acceptable behavior and expectations, and I back him fully.”

The POA results were tabulated three days after Tapia met with Williams in a closed-door meeting to discuss a possible suspension.

Tapia — who previously told The Desert Sun the case stemmed from a complaint he filed against a former sergeant — has declined to say what prompted the disciplinary hearings.

Tapia referred questions Tuesday to Monical, who said the POA helped craft the questions and paid an undisclosed amount for the survey.

The POA has not asked for his recommendations on how to fix the problems, Monical said.

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Comments for

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- Steve Grasha · Top commenter

It's time to start firing some employees...our community cannot allow the tail to wag the dog like happens with so many agencies. There are plenty of good, decent, experienced and qualified officers available to replace these disgruntled employees.



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Dangerous situation what with disgruntled cops with an assortment of weapons.



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At the DHS police department, what we have is a few good apples amongst many bad ones. Sometimes, when the mess is this large it takes real leadership to step down and bring in fresh people from top to bottom. The issue of how things got so rotten is not nearly as important to saving the city as the solution: new people. Now, who will step aside? I know! Not one single selfish one of 'em from top to bottom. Tapia has my fullest support. I can name three who don't: Hunt, Mendoza, the one who supposedly "followed up" on the Rojas child death. Total non-starters. **The mayor's office is another area of major concern. With the Mayor and Daniels and the police Chief all praising each other into each pay raise, there is little incentive to do anything that benefits the city or morale between the police force and the residents here. Harassment, discrimination, and incompetence until change arrives. That is what our tax dollars buy for now. Thanks to McGinty for publishing this article.**