

Statement from Hansel Alejandro Aguilar, Ph.D.
Former Director of Police Accountability, City of Berkeley
May 21, 2026

Last week I filed a lawsuit against the City of Berkeley arising from the City Council's decision to remove me as Director of Police Accountability on February 9, 2026, in a closed session.

This was not a decision I made lightly. I was born in Honduras, where weak institutions and the absence of accountable government have driven generations of families, including mine, to seek something different. That experience shaped everything that came after. I have spent more than fifteen years as a public servant in civilian oversight or criminal justice systems in this country, and during that time I have taken the oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States more than once. I have never taken those words lightly. The promise of constitutional government is one of the reasons my family came here, and the reason I have spent my career in oversight work: that institutions are bound by law, that public power has limits, and that those who exercise that power can be held accountable.

That is what makes this case deeply personal to me. Civilian oversight of police is one of the places where the rule of law meets the everyday lives of community members. It is where the Constitution lives or dies in practice. When I accepted the role of Director of Police Accountability after a national search, I accepted an obligation to carry it out faithfully, with respect for Berkeley's pioneering history of civilian oversight and with a commitment to strengthening public trust through independent, fair, and transparent accountability.

Throughout my tenure in Berkeley, I repeatedly worked to carry out the duties of the office in accordance with the Berkeley City Charter and the terms of my employment agreement. I sought clarity, structure, and collaboration, including a formal performance evaluation process that was never implemented despite my repeated requests and despite the City's own contractual obligations.

My complaint alleges that I was removed after engaging in protected activity, including raising concerns about Charter compliance, oversight authority, staffing constraints, records access, and other matters I believed were important to the lawful and effective functioning of the office.

I remain proud of the work we did to advance accountability, professionalism, and community trust. This case is about more than my individual removal. It is also about whether independent oversight can function as intended when those charged with carrying it out raise difficult but necessary concerns, and whether the institutions we rely on, and the leaders within them, remain bound by the laws and charters that define them.

Because this matter is now before the courts, I intend to let the legal process speak to these issues moving forward.

I am grateful to the many colleagues, community members, and supporters who have reached out with encouragement and care.

In Service,



Hansel Alejandro Aguilar, Ph.D.
Former Director of Police Accountability, City of Berkeley