



Tri-City confirms firing of 8 others



By [Lola Sherman](#)
Union-Tribune Staff Writer

2:00 a.m. May 6, 2009

NORTH COUNTY — A day after releasing terms of a severance package worth as much as \$1 million to former chief executive Arthur Gonzalez, Tri-City Healthcare District officials confirmed yesterday that they fired all other employees placed on paid administrative leave with Gonzalez on Dec. 18.

All but Gonzalez have been fired “for cause,” meaning they get no severance pay because the district says they failed in their job duties, said attorney Ray Artiano, who represents eight of the nine former administrators, including Gonzalez.

“The charges were all false,” Artiano said.

Gonzalez's settlement was effective Friday.

Artiano said the letters of termination, signed by Tri-City interim Chief Executive Larry Anderson, were hand-delivered to his other clients April 23.

Artiano's clients and their former job titles are: Allen Coleman, vice president of strategic services; Suellyn Ellerbe, chief operating officer and chief nurse executive; Robert Wardwell, chief financial officer; Doreen Sanderson, vice president of human resources; William “Terry” Howell, vice president of performance improvement; Daniel Groszkruger, director of information systems; and Ondrea Labella, director of patient business services.

The ninth employee, not represented by Artiano, has not been named.

“I can confirm that all employees who have been on leave of absence since Dec. 18, have been terminated by Tri-City Medical Center,” Anderson said in an e-mail yesterday. He declined to comment further, citing personnel privacy rights.

Board member RoseMarie Reno went further than Anderson. “I do know that the letters of termination went out – for cause,” she said.

Reno is part of a new majority of the seven-member board that placed nine administrators on leave in December. The board also launched a probe into district operations and finances, the results of which have never been revealed.

On March 26, the board gave Anderson the right to hire and fire all employees except the chief executive – a board responsibility.

Artiano said he will file lawsuits against the district next week alleging wrongful termination for all his clients except Gonzalez. The former chief executive's settlement resolves any issues of wrongdoing.

In general, Artiano said, the termination letters involved an administrative decision two years ago to turn \$58.4 million in fixed-rate bonds into auction-rate securities. The letters also indicated board members felt they were not kept informed on the status of earthquake-retrofit needs.

The public hospital district covers most of Oceanside, Vista and Carlsbad and operates the 397-bed Tri-City Medical Center in Oceanside.

In the past two years, the district has failed three times to pass bond measures for hospital retrofits.

The bond deal seemed appealing and was common practice at the time the board approved it because interest rates were about 3.5 percent. That rate shot to 17 percent when the economy faltered last fall.

“I’ve been practicing in this field for 30 years and I’ve never seen anything this egregious,” Artiano said of the termination decision.

He gave one example: an administrator accused of having invested in a competing hospital, although the hospital was in Tennessee with no California affiliates.

None of the fired employees returned calls yesterday.

Each fired employee has filed a claim seeking damages in excess of \$100,000.

Lola Sherman: (760) 476-8241; lola.sherman@uniontrib.com

In the Union-Tribune on Page B1

Find this article at:

<http://www3.signonsandiego.com/stories/2009/may/06/1m6tri011524-tri-city-confirms-firing-8-others/?uniontrib>

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

