

Comments to the Board of Directors, Joshua Basin Water District
Board Meeting, August 19, 2026

My name is Erin Gatlin. While I live in Yucca Valley, I have a strong interest in the district and its management because decisions made here can impact me. I am also interested in how business is conducted because your behavior as a Board and as a special district can impact the behavior of other public entities in the Morongo Basin.

I attended the meeting on August 5 and provided comments. I was therefore interested in how the significant amount of public participation and comment was addressed in the meeting minutes. The draft minutes of the August 5 meeting note the following regarding public comments: 28 comments were received electronically, and 18 members of the public spoke at the meeting. The notes then include the results of the motion to remove items 7a and 7b from the agenda. I was surprised, to say the least — I was there, and people had a lot to say.

I went back and looked at the meeting minutes for all JBWD meetings this year. In 2026, public comments were provided to this Board six times including August 5. Five of the six times the public provided comments, the minutes included the name of the person who spoke and the summary of their comment. The sixth time the public provided comments to the Board, on August 5, there was no record of the substance of the comments in the meeting minutes. None.

I think this is a mistake; it is important to keep a record of public comment because it's a record and it's district policy. Looking at the JBWD website, under Public Comment Policies, the first paragraph clearly states: "Comments.will.become.part.of.the.board.meeting.minutes" (<https://www.jbwd.com/public-comment-policies>). The policy is reflected in past practice by this board and should have been followed for the meeting on August 5.

I recognize that reading and summarizing comments takes time and effort. I know, because I did it for 25 years – any time I put a project out for public review. We did the work not just because the comments were part of the public record but because, importantly, it informed our work and supported decision-making.

The letters submitted in advance of the meeting remain on your website and available for public review. However, there is no written record of the comments provided by the eighteen people who spoke at the August 5 meeting. Eighteen people who took time out of their day to be here are not acknowledged beyond a note that "18 people spoke at the public meeting."

Again, this is not consistent with your stated policy or your own past practice, and it seems inconsistent with your stated value of Transparency.

I reviewed the recording of the meeting posted online and my notes. I offer the following brief summary of the comments provided to the board by the 18 people who spoke during the meeting.

- The vast majority of the comments supported President Doolittle, specifically – commenters noted how smart and forward thinking she is, and how hard she works. One commenter noted how much more engaged the board is with the community because of President Doolittle's efforts. Another commenter suggested that the three board members owed President Doolittle an apology.

I want to be clear about what I mean by “vast majority of comments.” All the comments were supportive of President Doolittle, other than the four or five comments that focused specifically on former director Short.

- Many comments noted the lack of information provided to the public in advance of the meeting. Several also noted how inappropriate this was given the seriousness of the proposed action – namely reorganizing the board and censuring President Doolittle.
- Many comments also noted the lack of due process – President Doolittle wasn’t made aware of the issues in advance and as a result she had no time to review or prepare a response.
- The actions of the three board members against President Doolittle were described as “embarrassing,” “shameful and embarrassing,” and “appalling.”
- The proposed censure was noted as inconsistent with how the board has dealt with issues in the past. The example provided was the past president whose behavior was so egregious that a sheriff had to be present during the board meetings. This past president was not disciplined, much less censured. On the other hand, President Doolittle is alleged to have sent too many emails. What does that even mean?
- A number of people commented on potential violations of the Brown Act by three board members and the GM. Others expressed concern that San Bernardino County was somehow involved or that bribes had been paid. Whether the allegations are true or not, trust has definitely been violated.

I am concerned these comments will get lost, or worse, purposely ignored. I think it is important to remember that this meeting caused a board member to resign and withdraw his candidacy for another term. Serious allegations were made against President Doolittle without any supporting information. It appears that board members and the GM may have violated the Brown Act. If we’re talking about censure, these actions, if proved, could get you there, because breaking the law as a public official is serious. It’s also a serious breach of confidence and trust.

In my comments to the board on August 5, I noted that based on the report from the Ad Hoc committee presented during the meeting on July 15, it appears there are issues related to communication and conflict that need to be addressed. In the draft minutes from the August 5 meeting, President Doolittle spoke very clearly and acknowledged how her actions may have contributed to any communication issues. She also spoke about a willingness to address the conflicts and work through them. The rest of you, members of the Board and the General Manager, have not. If you are actually interested in resolving the conflicts and communication issues, you will have to acknowledge your contributions to the situation as well. No one is a passenger in this situation. All have responsibility.

A number of commenters also expressed hope that the Board will learn from this experience and do better in the future. To learn from an experience, you have to acknowledge that it occurred. Acknowledging both the depth and volume, and the very clear messages from the people who spoke is the first step.

I strongly recommend a more detailed summary of the comments received from the public, both the written comments and those from the meeting itself, be prepared so the comments can inform your efforts going forward and improve decision-making.

Thank you.