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Dr. Jason Newsom, Director
Bay County Health Department
597 West 11th Street
Panama City, FL 32401-233

May 6, 2009

Dr. Newsom:

As you're surely well aware, the sluggish economy continues to have a negative affect on businesses in Bay County – we've seen several employers shut down in recent months, leaving hundreds of area families in tough financial times.

It is with this in mind that I write to air my concerns about the increasingly vitriolic messages on the billboard outside the health department. "Dunkin' Donuts = death," and another recent one about Kentucky Fried Chicken come to mind, specifically.

You have defended these types of messages as being in the public's best interest; however, considering the current economic landscape, I question the wisdom of deliberately jeopardizing any local business' ability to keep people employed, particularly on the taxpayers' dime.

More important, I think these messages specifically naming local businesses enters dangerously close into territory that could easily put the Health Department, state and Bay County at risk of a lawsuit.

Amazingly enough, as of May 2009 it is still legal in this country to eat a piece of fried chicken or a donut. I understand that you're doing what you believe is your job as the public health director; however, as a Bay County commissioner, I believe it is my duty to speak up in an effort to avoid unnecessary and expensive litigation.

Difficult budgetary decisions are pending, and I have no intention of supporting the continued funding of the Bay County Health Department as long as you are at its helm making personal attacks against local businesses using taxpayer money. The simplest solution to this problem would be your immediate resignation, as Bay County is not in a position to fund the litigation that will surely follow these attacks.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mike Thomas".

Mike Thomas
Bay County Commissioner, District 5