Humboldt Animal Cases: Ray Christie & Miranda's Rescue

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Overview

Both cases are Humboldt County animal cases handled by Sheriff William Honsal's office. Ray Christie was arrested and prosecuted after a 2018 raid, and is now suing the county in federal court. Miranda's Rescue is under a criminal investigation that started in April 2026, but no one has been charged yet.

Both cases are still open as of September 30, 2026.

Case 1: Ray Christie v. County of Humboldt

Ray Christie, an Arcata cattle rancher, filed a federal civil rights lawsuit on December 1, 2025. He says county officials violated his constitutional rights during a 2018 raid and the five years of prosecution that followed. The case is still open, and the judge is deciding whether to dismiss it.

Case details

Item	Details
Case name	Christie v. County of Humboldt et al.
Case number	5:25-cv-10328-NW (VKD)
Court	U.S. District Court, Northern District of California (San Jose)
Judge	Noël Wise
Filed	December 1, 2025
Type	Civil case (federal civil rights)
Plaintiff's lawyers	Larson LLP, Los Angeles; lead counsel Rick Richmond

Item	Details
County's lawyers	Deputy County Counsel Joel Campbell-Blair and Destinee Valeska

Who he is suing

- The County of Humboldt
- Sheriff William Honsal
- Travis Mendes, former Sheriff's Office livestock deputy (later reported working for CAL FIRE)
- Adrian Kamada, former Deputy District Attorney (now a Deputy Public Defender)

What he claims

- The 68-page complaint says officials violated his **Fourth Amendment** rights (protection from unreasonable searches) and **Fourteenth Amendment** rights (due process, meaning fair treatment by the government).
- The March 2018 raid was a large "SWAT-style" multi-agency raid on his ranch in the Arcata Bottoms. Over 20 officers took part, plus the Drug Task Force, Fish and Wildlife, USDA, and a hazmat team.
- He says he and his partner were ordered outside barefoot in cold, wet weather before the house was searched.
- He says officers ignored his requests for a lawyer and questioned him anyway. He says this questioning was secretly recorded and the recording was hidden for over a year.
- He accuses Mendes of evidence tampering, such as staging photos and moving evidence, and lying under oath.
- He says Mendes, Kamada, and Honsal were biased against him and ignored violations at other ranches.
- He says his business, buying sick or weak cattle and nursing them back to health, was wrongly called abuse.

The earlier criminal case

- After the raid, Christie was charged with felony animal cruelty. Close to 300 dead cows were reportedly found on his land.
- A first trial ended in a hung jury (the jury couldn't agree).
- The charges were dismissed in 2023 after his lawyers challenged the evidence. He was never convicted.

What he wants

Money for lost income and business, legal fees, damage to his reputation, and emotional distress. He also asks for punitive damages (extra money meant to punish) and a court order.

Timeline of the lawsuit

1. December 1, 2025: lawsuit filed.
2. December 2025: the Board of Supervisors reported that County Counsel would represent three of the four defendants. Mendes needs his own lawyer.
3. February 17–18, 2026: all four defendants were served (officially handed the lawsuit).
4. 2026: the county filed a **motion to dismiss** (asked the judge to throw the case out). A hearing was first set for August 5.
5. September 2026: Judge Wise heard arguments from both sides and took the matter "under submission." That means she will decide later, in writing. She gave no hint how she will rule.

Related news

- Christie became majority owner of Redwood Meat Co., the region's only USDA-certified slaughterhouse, which closed in 2024. He planned to reopen it in summer 2026.
- A separate state eminent domain case (the government taking land for public use) involves Christie's land, with a hearing that was set for April 3, 2026.

Correction to earlier notes: An earlier research file listed the case number as 3:25-cv-10328 and the filing date as December 2, 2025. The court's own page shows **5:25-cv-10328** and **December 1, 2025**.

Case 2: Miranda's Rescue Investigation

Miranda's Rescue, a Fortuna animal nonprofit, is under a multi-agency criminal investigation into alleged animal cruelty, fraud, and theft. Owner Shannon Miranda has not been arrested or charged after almost five months. He denies the allegations.

How it started

- In late April 2026, two Fortuna women, Jennifer Raymond and Jenna Moore, went onto a field at the rescue at night from Raymond's neighboring property. They dug up the bodies of eight dogs.

- In June, the Sheriff's Office returned with a second search warrant and heavy equipment.

What investigators found

- 117 intact dog remains from two dig sites.
- 21 skulls, hundreds of bones, and six loose microchips from a third site.
- Sheriff Honsal said 730 animals were unaccounted for. The rescue had received over 900 animals from shelters between January 2025 and spring 2026.
- Agencies helping include the FBI, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the California Department of Justice.

What investigators say

- Sheriff's Sgt. Shane Steele said in a sworn affidavit that Miranda charged $450 to $1,000 or more for each surrendered dog.
- Detective Julian Aguilera testified he believes Miranda killed dogs to make room for more and earn more money.
- The Sheriff's Office says it won't be rushed. Honsal said the investigation will be thorough, objective, and impartial.

What Miranda says

- He says he only euthanized dogs too dangerous to adopt.
- He told the *Lost Coast Outpost* he is guilty only of bad record-keeping.
- He has accused investigators of misconduct and asked the public to be patient while the legal process works.

Changes in September 2026

1. **Permit restored.** The county suspended the rescue's conditional use permit on July 31 for using a neighboring parcel not covered by the permit. Planning and Building Director John Ford restored it after the rescue agreed to stop using that parcel, stop euthanizing animals, and remove an unpermitted modular building. The rescue can again take in and adopt out animals.
2. **Deadlines remain.** Under a May compliance agreement, the rescue has until September 30 to submit plans to raise buildings above the Eel River's 100-year flood level. It has until October 15 for county Environmental Health to approve its well and wastewater system.

3. **Inspections stopped.** Animal control had been checking the animals three times a week, with Miranda's cooperation. A court denied the sheriff's request to order monitoring. In September, Miranda stopped allowing visits on his attorney's advice. The Sheriff's Office says it has no legal authority to demand access.

Other actions on separate tracks

- **Civil lawsuit:** Rocket Dog Rescue, an Oakland nonprofit, is suing Miranda for alleged animal cruelty and fraud.
- **Attorney General request:** Jennifer Raymond has asked the state Attorney General to dissolve the nonprofit and appoint someone to care for the remaining animals.
- **Thrift stores:** Two of the rescue's four Humboldt thrift stores closed in July. One remaining store removed "Miranda's Rescue" from its sign.
- **Former staff account:** A former office manager described poor conditions at the rescue. Miranda disputed nearly all of it.

Public response

- Protesters gathered outside the Humboldt County Courthouse in Eureka on September 28, 2026, from 4 to 7 p.m. It was at least their third courthouse protest.
- Commenter Joanne McGarry, a longtime local animal advocate, suggested a temporary pause on rescues bringing in out-of-county animals. Her reason is that the county shelter in McKinleyville is often over capacity. No such rule exists now. The Board of Supervisors would likely need to create it.
- Another commenter noted that a person must be convicted before being sentenced to jail.

Anyone with information can call the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office at (707) 445-7251.

How the Law Shows Up in Each Case

The same constitutional protections appear in both cases, but they played out very differently. Christie was charged quickly and later sued. Miranda has not been charged, and the law now limits what the sheriff can do.

Topic	Ray Christie	Miranda's Rescue
Sheriff	William Honsal	William Honsal

Topic	Ray Christie	Miranda's Rescue
Search	2018 multi-agency raid	Two search warrants, April and June 2026
Arrest and charges	Arrested and charged with felony animal cruelty	Not arrested or charged after about 5 months
Outcome so far	Charges dismissed in 2023; never convicted	Investigation ongoing
Civil lawsuit	Christie is suing the county	Rocket Dog Rescue is suing Miranda
County permits	Not part of this case	Permit suspended, then restored under a compliance agreement

1. **Same sheriff, different speed.** Christie was arrested and prosecuted for years. Miranda has not been charged after five months. The article does not say why. One possible reason is that the Christie case fell apart and led to a lawsuit, so officials may be more careful now. This is only a guess.
2. **The Fourth Amendment works both ways.** Christie says it was violated during his raid and questioning. In Miranda's case, the same protection is limiting the sheriff. Without a warrant or court order, deputies cannot demand access to the property.
3. **Innocent until proven guilty.** Protesters want Miranda jailed. But a person must be convicted before being sentenced. Christie was never convicted either.
4. **County permits and compliance agreements.** Planning and Building Director John Ford also appears in the cannabis abatement case (Thomas v. County of Humboldt). Miranda got his permit back after agreeing to fixes, with deadlines. In the abatement case, owners said they faced large daily fines and no hearings. It may be worth asking whether the county treats different kinds of property owners the same way.
5. **Criminal vs. civil tracks.** Both stories involve separate legal tracks. Christie's lawsuit is civil. Rocket Dog's suit against Miranda is civil. Any charges against Miranda would be criminal.

Legal Background

These terms help explain both cases. Civil cases fix a harm; criminal cases punish a crime. The same event can lead to both.

Civil vs. criminal cases

	Civil case	Criminal case
Who brings it	A person or group sues another	The government (District Attorney) charges someone
Goal	Money or a court order	Punishment: jail, probation, or fines
Jail possible?	No	Yes
Proof needed	"More likely than not"	"Beyond a reasonable doubt" (much higher)
Example	Christie suing the county	Christie's 2018 animal cruelty charges

Other kinds of cases

- **Family court:** divorce, custody, child support. A type of civil case.
- **Small claims:** small money disputes, usually without lawyers.
- **Administrative hearings:** run by a government agency, not a regular court. Example: county code enforcement fines in the cannabis abatement case.
- **Appeals:** asking a higher court to review a lower court's decision.

Why administrative hearings have no jury

The Seventh Amendment says a jury trial is kept "where the value in controversy shall exceed twenty dollars." But the same sentence says it applies to **"Suits at common law."** Courts read those words as a limit.

1. **"Common law" suits** means the kinds of lawsuits people brought in 1791, like suing for a debt or damage.
2. **"Public rights."** When the government enforces its own rules (permits, codes, licenses), courts call these "public rights." The 1977 case *Atlas Roofing* said agencies can decide them without juries.
3. **States aren't bound.** In 1916, the Supreme Court said the Seventh Amendment applies only in federal court. It is one of the few Bill of Rights protections never applied to the states. California's own constitution has a jury right, with similar limits.
4. **Speed and cost.** Agencies say hearings are faster, cheaper, and run by people who know the subject.

After an administrative hearing in California, you can usually ask a regular court to review the decision. The judge mostly checks whether the hearing was fair and followed the law. There is still no jury.

The debate. Many people read the Seventh Amendment more broadly. Justice Gorsuch argued for a broad jury right in *SEC v. Jarkesy* (2024). The Institute for Justice argued the same point when it asked the Supreme Court to review Humboldt's cannabis fines. The Court declined to take that question. Critics say the "public rights" idea lets governments avoid juries by calling a case administrative. Supporters say juries for every permit or ticket would overwhelm the courts. Right now, courts say the system is constitutional, but the debate is live.

Two 2024 Supreme Court cases that limited agencies

- ***SEC v. Jarkesy* (June 2024):** the SEC cannot impose certain fraud penalties without a jury. This opened the door to more jury challenges.
- ***Loper Bright Enterprises v. Raimondo* (June 2024):** overturned **Chevron deference**. Under Chevron (from a 1984 case), judges had to accept a federal agency's reasonable reading of an unclear law. Now judges decide for themselves what an unclear law means.

What Loper Bright did not change:

- It does not give anyone a jury trial. That is Jarkesy's subject.
- Courts still usually respect an agency's findings about what happened.
- It applies to federal agencies. California courts never followed Chevron closely. They use their own standard from a 1998 case, *Yamaha*, where judges make the final call. So Humboldt County code enforcement is mostly unaffected.

Together, these two cases shifted power from federal agencies back toward courts.

Sources

Ray Christie case

- Court case page: Christie v. County of Humboldt – U.S. District Court, N.D. Cal. (free)
- Lost Coast Outpost – Christie sues county, sheriff, and others (Dec 2, 2025) (includes a link to download the full complaint)
- Redheaded Blackbelt – Christie files federal civil rights lawsuit (Dec 3, 2025)
- Larson LLP – Christie civil rights lawsuit

- PR Newswire – Rancher sues Humboldt County and three officials
- The Pepperbox – Arcata Bottoms rancher files civil rights lawsuit
- Lost Coast Outpost – Christie plans to reopen Redwood Meat Co. (June 15, 2026)
- John Chiv blog – County Counsel to represent three of four defendants (Dec 16, 2025)
- John Chiv blog – December 2025 posts
- John Chiv blog – latest posts, including the motion to dismiss hearing

Miranda's Rescue case

- Redheaded Blackbelt – Protest at Humboldt Courthouse (Sept 28, 2026)
- Joanne McGarry's comment on that article
- Humboldt County news release on the search
- KRCR – County suspends Miranda's Rescue permits
- KRCR – County reinstates Miranda's Rescue permit
- North Coast Journal – Miranda's Rescue under scrutiny
- Lost Coast Outpost – Miranda now denying access to animal control (Sept 25, 2026)
- Lost Coast Outpost – Two thrift stores permanently close (July 30, 2026)
- Press Democrat – Ex-staffer describes conditions (Sept 25, 2026)
- Redheaded Blackbelt – Honsal responds to Miranda's claims (July 31, 2026)
- Jefferson Public Radio – Miranda's Rescue dog deaths investigation (June 5, 2026)

Related: cannabis abatement case and jury trials

- Institute for Justice – Humboldt Abatements case page
- Institute for Justice – Supreme Court petition on jury trials (PDF)
- Ninth Circuit decision, Thomas v. County of Humboldt (Dec 30, 2024, PDF)

The legal background on civil vs. criminal cases, administrative hearings, *Jarkesy*, and *Loper Bright* is general legal knowledge, not from a single source. Check case status directly with the court before relying on it.