OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL · STATE OF TEXAS
JOHN CORNYN

March 4, 2002

Mr. James L. Hall
Assistant General Counsel
Texas Department of Criminal Justice
P.O. Box 4004
Huntsville, Texas 77342

OR2002-1058

Dear Mr. Hall:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 159571.

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (the "department") received a request for any information pertaining to a specified investigation that involved a use of force. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.108, 552.117, and 552.134 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.134 of the Government Code relates to inmates of the department. This exception provides in relevant part:

> (a) Except as provided by Subsection (b) or by Section 552.029 [of the Government Code], information obtained or maintained by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice is excepted from [required public disclosure] if it is information about an inmate who is confined in a facility operated by or under a contract with the department.

Gov't Code § 552.134(a). Section 552.029 of the Government Code provides, however, that "[n]otwithstanding . . . Section 552.134," eight specified categories of "information about an inmate who is confined in a facility operated by or under a contract with [the department are] subject to required disclosure." These eight categories of information include "basic

information regarding the death of an inmate in custody, an incident involving the use of force, or an alleged crime involving the inmate." Gov't Code § 552.029(8). Thus, the legislature explicitly made section 552.134 subject to section 552.029.

Section 552.134(a) is applicable to the requested information. However, the submitted information relates to an investigation of an incident involving a use of force, and also relates to an alleged crime involving inmates. Therefore, section 552.029(8) requires the disclosure of basic information about this incident. The basic information that is subject to disclosure under section 552.029(8) includes the time and place of the incident, the names of inmates and of department employees who were involved, a brief narrative of the incident, a brief description of any injuries sustained by anyone involved, and information regarding any criminal charges or disciplinary actions that were filed as a result of the incident. The information that is not subject to release under section 552.029 is excepted from disclosure under section 552.134. As we are able to make this determination, we need not address your arguments under sections 552.108 and 552.117.[1]

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one

---

[1]We note that section 552.108 does not except from disclosure "basic information about an arrested person, an arrest, or a crime." *See* Gov't Code § 552.108(c); *Houston Chronicle Publ'g Co. v. City of Houston*, 531 S.W.2d 177, 186-87 (Tex. Civ. App.--Houston [14th Dist.] 1975), *writ ref'd n.r.e. per curiam*, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976); Open Records Decision No. 127 at 3-4 (1976).

of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at 877/673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.--Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at 512/475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,

Michael A. Pearle
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

MAP/seg

Ref: ID# 159571

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Beverly Bullock
P.O. Box 861
Springville, Alabama 35146
(w/o enclosures)