OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL · STATE OF TEXAS
JOHN CORNYN

April 12, 2002

Ms. Tamara Pitts
Assistant City Attorney
City of Fort Worth
1000 Throckmorton Street
Fort Worth, Texas 76102

OR2002-1828

Dear Ms. Pitts:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 161215.

The City of Fort Worth (the "city") received a request for all police records and reports on the requestor's children from 1997 to the present, the police dispatch log for a specified address, and police records on three named individuals. You have submitted one offense report that you claim is excepted from disclosure. We assume that the city has released the remaining requested information to the extent that it exists. If you have not, you must do so at this time. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.021, .301, .302; Open Records Decision No. 664 (2000). We caution, however, that section 552.352 of the Public Information Act imposes criminal penalties for the release of confidential information. If you believe this information is confidential and may not lawfully be released, you must challenge the ruling in court as outlined below. You claim that the submitted report is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and have reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code protects "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision," which includes information made confidential by other statutes. Section 261.201 of the Family Code reads in part as follows:

> (a) The following information is confidential, is not subject to public release under Chapter 552, Government Code, and may be disclosed only for purposes consistent with this code and applicable federal or state law or under rules adopted by an investigating agency:

> (1) a report of alleged or suspected abuse or neglect made under this chapter and the identity of the person making the report; and
>
> (2) except as otherwise provided in this section, the files, reports, records, communications, audiotapes, videotapes, and working papers used or developed in an investigation under this chapter or in providing services as a result of an investigation.

We believe that the submitted information consists of a report used or developed in an investigation made under chapter 261 of the Family Code. Because you have not cited any specific rule that the investigating agency has adopted with regard to the release of this type of information, we assume that no such regulation exists. Given that assumption, the offense report is confidential pursuant to section 261.201 of the Family Code. *See* Open Records Decision No. 440 at 2 (1986) (construing predecessor statute). Accordingly, you must not release the requested report to the requestor.[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

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[1]We note that if the investigation has been referred to the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (the "department"), a parent who is a requestor may be entitled to access to the department's records. Section 261.201(g) of the Family Code provides that the department, upon request and subject to its own rules:

> shall provide to the parent, managing conservator, or other legal representative of a child who is the subject of reported abuse or neglect information concerning the reported abuse or neglect that would otherwise be confidential under this section if the department has edited the information to protect the confidentiality of the identity of the person who made the report and any other person whose life or safety may be endangered by the disclosure.

Fam. Code § 261.201(g).

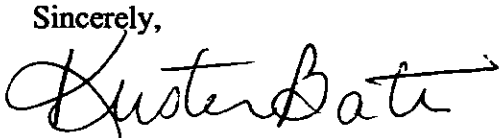
statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records 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 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,



Kristen Bates
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

KAB/seg

Ref: ID# 161215

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Marilyn Haumesser
609 Northwest 5th Street
Andrews, Texas 79714
(w/o enclosures)