OFFICE *of the* ATTORNEY GENERAL
GREG ABBOTT

December 20, 2002

Ms. Mitzi Chafetz
Custodian of Records
Texas Funeral Service Commission
P.O. Box 12217
Austin, Texas 78711

OR2002-7357

Dear Ms. Chafetz:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID#174137.

The Texas Funeral Services Commission (the "commission") received a request for information regarding complaint number 02-400. You assert that the submitted information is confidential pursuant to section 651.203 of the Occupations Code and thus excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure information "considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Section 651.203 of the Occupations Code provides that "[i]nformation in a [complaint file], other than information relating to a complaint that has not reached a final disposition, is public information." We conclude that this language makes confidential information relating to a complaint that has not reached a final disposition. You state that the complaint that is the subject of this request for information is an open complaint currently under investigation. Based on your arguments and our review of the submitted information, we agree that the submitted information which constitutes the complaint file in this matter is confidential under section 651.203(b) of the Occupations Code and, thus, is excepted from disclosure pursuant to section 552.101 of the Government Code. Accordingly, you must withhold the submitted information from the requestor.

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 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,

Heather Pendleton Ross
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

HPR/sdk

Ref: ID# 174137

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Mr. Weldon Davis
Funeral Director in Charge
Austin Mortuary Service
P.O. Box 41238
Austin, Texas 78704
(w/o enclosures)