



OFFICE *of the* ATTORNEY GENERAL
GREG ABBOTT

May 27, 2003

Chief Samith C. Hill
Forest Hill Police Department
3336 Horton Road
Forest Hill, Texas 76119

OR2003-3552

Dear Chief Hill:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 181713.

The Forest Hill Police Department (the "department") received a request for information regarding reprimands and other disciplinary actions, and information relating to all internal investigations, pertaining to three named former department employees. You claim that the responsive information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.111 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.¹

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." This section encompasses information protected by other statutes, such as section 143.089(g) of the Local Government Code. You indicate that the City of Forest Hill is a civil service city under chapter 143 of the Local Government Code. Section 143.089 contemplates two different types of personnel files, a file that must be maintained by the city's civil service director or his designee and another file that may be maintained by the city's police

¹ We assume that the "representative sample" of records submitted to this office is truly representative of the requested records as a whole. See Open Records Decision Nos. 499 (1988), 497 (1988). This open records letter does not reach, and therefore does not authorize the withholding of, any other requested records to the extent that those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

department for its own use. Local Gov't Code § 143.089(a), (g). In cases in which a police department takes disciplinary action against a peace officer, the department is required by section 143.089(a)(2) to place records relating to the investigation and disciplinary action in the peace officer's civil service file maintained under section 143.089(a). Such records are subject to release under chapter 552 of the Government Code. *See* Local Gov't Code § 143.089(f); Open Records Decision No. 562 at 6 (1990). However, information maintained in a police department's personnel file pursuant to section 143.089(g) is confidential and must not be released. *City of San Antonio v. Tex. Attorney Gen.*, 851 S.W.2d 946, 949 (Tex. App.—Austin 1993, writ denied).

You indicate that the submitted information is maintained in the departmental personnel files of the officers at issue for the use of the department pursuant to section 143.089(g). Therefore, we find that the submitted information is confidential pursuant to section 143.089(g) of the Local Government Code and must be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code.² Based on this finding, we do not reach your claim under section 552.111 of the Government Code.

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

²Section 143.089(g) requires a police department that receives a request for information maintained in a file under section 143.089(g) to refer that person to the civil service director or the director's designee. You state that you have referred the requestor to the city civil service director.

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 Dep't of Pub. 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,



David R. Saldivar
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

DRS/seg

Ref: ID# 181713

Enc: Submitted documents

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(w/o enclosures)