ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

January 14, 2004

Ms. Noelle C. Letteri
Attorney
Texas General Land Office
P. O. Box 12873
Austin, Texas 78711-2873

OR2004-0303

Dear Ms. Letteri:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 194384.

The School Land Board (the "board") received a request for a copy of audiotape recordings from a specified executive session meeting of the board, as well as a copy of the audiotape recording from an open session meeting of the board held on the same date. You state that the board will provide the requestor with the requested audiotape recording from the open session meeting of the board. You claim, however, that the remaining requested information is excepted from disclosure pursuant to section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim.

You claim that the copy of the audiotape recording from the specified executive session meeting of the board is excepted from disclosure pursuant to section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 551.104 of the Government Code.[1] Section 551.104(c) provides that "[t]he certified agenda or tape of a closed meeting is available for public inspection and copying only under a court order issued under Subsection (b)(3)." Gov't Code § 551.104(c). We note that section 551.146 penalizes the unlawful disclosure of a certified agenda or tape recording of a lawfully closed meeting as a Class B

[1] Section 552.101 excepts from disclosure information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision. *See* Gov't Code § 552.101. Section 552.101 encompasses information that is protected from disclosure by other statutes.

misdemeanor and makes the person responsible for disclosure liable for damages to a person injured or damaged by the disclosure. *See* Gov't Code § 551.146. We also note that such information cannot be released to a member of the public in response to an open records request. *See* Open Records Decision No. 495 (1988) (construing statutory predecessor). Furthermore, the attorney general lacks the authority to review such information to determine whether a governmental body may withhold such information from disclosure under the statutory predecessor to section 552.101 of the Government Code. *See id.* Therefore, chapter 551 of the Government Code prohibits the submission of such information to this office for review.

We understand that the audiotape recording at issue relates to a closed session meeting of the board and was created pursuant to section 551.103 of the Government Code. You state that no court order has been issued with respect to the public inspection and copying of this recording. Based on your representations, we conclude that the board must withhold this requested audiotape recording pursuant to section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 551.104(c) 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).

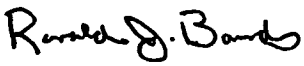
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following 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 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,



Ronald J. Bounds
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

RJB/lmt

Ref: ID# 194384

c: Ms. Mary E. Kelly
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