



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

February 17, 2005

Ms. Renée Mauzy
General Counsel
Department of Information Resources
P.O. Box 13564
Austin, Texas 78711-3564

OR2005-01471

Dear Ms. Mauzy:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Public Information Act (the "Act"), chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 218947.

The Texas Department of Information Resources (the "department") received a request for a specific document written in response to a grievance filed by the requestor. You claim that the requested information is 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." Gov't Code § 552.101. Section 552.101 encompasses the doctrine of common law privacy, which protects information if (1) the information contains highly intimate or embarrassing facts, the publication of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person, and (2) the information is not of legitimate concern to the public. *Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 685 (Tex. 1976), *cert. denied*, 430 U.S. 931 (1977).

The type of information considered intimate and embarrassing by the Texas Supreme Court in *Industrial Foundation* included information relating to sexual assault, pregnancy, mental or physical abuse in the workplace, illegitimate children, psychiatric treatment of mental disorders, attempted suicide, and injuries to sexual organs. 540 S.W.2d at 683. In addition,

this office has found that some kinds of medical information or information indicating disabilities or specific illnesses are excepted from required public disclosure under common-law privacy. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 470 (1987) (illness from severe emotional and job-related stress), 455 (1987) (prescription drugs, illnesses, operations, and physical handicaps).

In this instance, while the submitted document contains information protected by common law privacy, the requestor, as the individual to whom this private information pertains, has a special right of access to this information pursuant to section 552.023 of the Government Code. *See* Gov't Code § 552.023 (person or person's authorized representative has special right of access to information that is protected by laws intended to protect person's privacy), *see also* *Morales v. Ellen*, 840 S.W.2d 519 (Tex. App.—El Paso 1992, *writ denied*) (identity of victims of sexual harassment was highly intimate or embarrassing information and public did not have legitimate interest in such information). The remaining information, which pertains to the requestor's grievance against her former supervisor, is of legitimate public interest and is, therefore, not protected by common law privacy. *See generally* Open Records Decision Nos. 470 (1987) (public employee's job performance does not generally constitute his private affairs), 455 (1987) (public employee's job performances or abilities generally not protected by privacy), 444 (1986) (public has legitimate interest in knowing reasons for dismissal, demotion, promotion, or resignation of public employees), 423 at 2 (1984) (scope of public employee privacy is narrow), 329 at 2 (1982) (information relating to complaints against public employees and discipline resulting therefrom is not protected under former Gov't Code § 552.101), 208 at 2 (1978) (information relating to complaint against public employee and disposition of the complaint is not protected under either the constitutional or common-law right of privacy).

We note, however, that portions of the submitted information may be excepted from disclosure under section 552.117(a)(1) of the Government Code. Section 552.117(a)(1) provides that information is excepted from disclosure if it relates to a current or former employee's home address, home telephone number, social security number, or reveals whether the employee has family members. The department is required to withhold this information if the employee timely requested that it be kept confidential under section 552.024 of the Government Code. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 622 (1994), 455 (1987); *see generally* Open Records Decision No. 530 (1989) (stating that whether particular piece of information is public must be determined at time request for it is made). The department may not, however, withhold the information of an employee who made the request for confidentiality under section 552.024 after a request for information is made. You have not indicated whether, prior to the department's receipt of this written request, the employee at issue elected to withhold his personal information from disclosure in accordance with section 552.024. Thus, if the employee did make a timely election under section 552.024, the department must withhold the marked information under section 552.117. If the employee

did not make a timely election under section 552.024, the marked information, along with the remaining submitted information, must be released to 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, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records promptly pursuant to section 552.221(a) of the Government Code or file a lawsuit challenging this ruling pursuant to section 552.324 of the Government Code. If the governmental body fails to do one of these things, 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); *Tex. 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,



Caroline E. Cho
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CEC/sdk

Ref: ID# 218947

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Debbie Opdahl
541 Nomad
Spicewood, Texas 78669
(w/o enclosures)