



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

May 4, 2005

Ms. YuShan Chang  
Assistant City Attorney  
City of Houston Legal Department  
P.O. Box 1562  
Houston, Texas 77251-1562

OR2005-03869

Dear Ms. Chang:

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# 223274.

The Houston Police Department (the "department") received a request for all complaints and reprimands of certain police officers and training guidelines and policies. You inform us that the guidelines and policies will be released but claim that other requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.1175, 552.119 and 552.130 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions 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." This exception encompasses information that other statutes make confidential. You raise section 552.101 in conjunction with section 143.1214 of the Local Government Code. Section 143.1214 provides in part:

(b) The department shall maintain an investigatory file that relates to a disciplinary action against a fire fighter or police officer that was overturned on appeal, or any document in the possession of the department that relates to a charge of misconduct against a fire fighter or police officer, regardless of whether the charge is sustained, only in a file created by the department for

the department's use. The department may only release information in those investigatory files or documents relating to a charge of misconduct:

- (1) to another law enforcement agency or fire department;
- (2) to the office of a district or United States attorney; or
- (3) in accordance with Subsection (c).

(c) The department head or the department head's designee may forward a document that relates to a disciplinary action against a fire fighter or police officer to the [civil service] director or the director's designee for inclusion in the fire fighter's or police officer's personnel file maintained under Sections 143.089(a)-(f) [of the Local Government Code] only if:

- (1) disciplinary action was actually taken against the fire fighter or police officer;
- (2) the document shows the disciplinary action taken; and
- (3) the document includes at least a brief summary of the facts on which the disciplinary action was based.

Local Gov't Code § 143.1214(b)-(c). You indicate that the information at issue in Exhibits 2 and 3 relates to investigations that did not result in disciplinary action. Thus, you indicate that the information is maintained by the department in a departmental file and is not part of the police officer's civil service personnel file. *See* Local Gov't Code § 143.1214(c); *see also* Local Gov't Code § 143.089(a)-(f). Based on your representations and our review of the information, we conclude that the information at issue in Exhibits 2 and 3 is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code, in conjunction with section 143.1214 of the Local Government Code, as information made confidential by law. *See also* Open Records Decision No. 642 (1996) (concluding that files relating to investigations of Houston Fire Department personnel by Public Integrity Review Group of Houston Police Department were confidential under section 143.1214).

The information at issue in Exhibit 4, however, relates to an investigation that did result in disciplinary action. You indicate that the information in Exhibit 4 is maintained by the department in a departmental file. You also indicate that you have forwarded the "documents meeting the requirements of § 143.1214(c) to the officers' personnel files maintained under 143.089(a)." However, you state that not all of the documents in Exhibit 4 have been forwarded to the officer's civil service file because they do not meet all of the conditions of section 143.1214(c). Based on your representations, we conclude that the submitted information contained in Exhibit 4 is excepted from disclosure under

section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 143.1214 of the Local Government Code. *See also* Open Records Decision No. 642 (1996) (concluding that files relating to investigations of Houston Fire Department personnel by Public Integrity Review Group of Houston Police Department were confidential under Loc. Gov't Code § 143.1214).<sup>1</sup>

In summary, because the information at issue in Exhibits 2 and 3 relates to investigations that did not result in disciplinary action, this information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code, in conjunction with section 143.1214 of the Local Government Code, as information made confidential by law. Therefore, the information in Exhibits 2 and 3 must be withheld. Additionally, the information in Exhibit 4 must be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code, in conjunction with section 143.1214 of the Local Government Code, as information made confidential by law because the information is maintained in the departmental file and does not meet the criteria of section 143.1214(c) to be placed in the civil service file. As our ruling on these issues is dispositive, we need not address your remaining arguments.

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).

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<sup>1</sup>You note that the department will, however, direct the requestor to the City's Human Resources Department for further responsive information contained within the civil service file.

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,



Kazzye W. Martens  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

KWM/seg

Ref: ID# 223274

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Brenda Doucette  
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(w/o enclosures)