ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

January 17, 2006

Ms. Julie Joe
Assistant County Attorney
Travis County
P.O. Box 1748
Austin, Texas 78767

OR2006-00505

Dear Ms. Joe:

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# 240214.

The Travis County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff") received two requests for information related to a specific incident. 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. We have also received and considered comments submitted by one of the requestors. *See* Gov't Code § 552.304 (providing that interested party may submit comments stating why information should or should not be released).

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision, and encompasses information protected by other statutes. Section 261.201(a) of the Family Code provides as follows:

> (a) The following information is confidential, is not subject to public release under Chapter 552, Government Code, and may be disclosed only for purposes consistent with this code and applicable federal or state law or under rules adopted by an investigating agency:

> (1) a report of alleged or suspected abuse or neglect made under this chapter and the identity of the person making the report; and
>
> (2) except as otherwise provided in this section, the files, reports, records, communications, audiotapes, videotapes, and working papers used or developed in an investigation under this chapter or in providing services as a result of an investigation.

Fam. Code § 261.201(a). The submitted information, which comprises files, reports, records, communications, audiotapes, videotapes, and working papers used or developed in an investigation under this chapter, relates to an investigation of alleged neglectful supervision resulting in the death of a child. You have not indicated that the sheriff has adopted a rule that governs the release of this type of information. Therefore, we assume that no such regulation exists. Given that assumption, the information is confidential pursuant to section 261.201 of the Family Code. *See* Open Records Decision No. 440 at 2 (1986) (predecessor statute). Accordingly, the sheriff must withhold the submitted information from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code as information made confidential by law.

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).

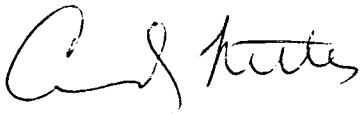
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records 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); *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 Office of the Attorney General 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,



Cindy Nettles
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CN/er

Ref: ID# 240214

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Thomas A. Guerra
TDI Services
P.O. Box 1448
Pharr, Texas 78577
(w/o enclosures)

Ms. Jessica L. Mangrum
Thompson, Coe, Cousins & Irons, L.L.P.
701 Brazos, Suite 1500
Austin Centre
Austin, Texas 78701
(w/o enclosures)