



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

February 8, 2006

Mr. Ernesto Rodriguez
Assistant City Attorney
City of El Paso
2 Civic Center Plaza, 9th Floor
El Paso, Texas 79901

OR2006-01319

Dear Mr. Rodriguez:

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# 241857.

The El Paso Police Department (the "department") received a request for information regarding a specified incident involving a named individual. 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.

Initially, we note the submitted information includes complaint affidavits that may be subject to article 15.26 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. Article 15.26 states "[t]he arrest warrant, and any affidavit presented to the magistrate in support of the issuance of the warrant, is public information." Crim. Proc. Code art. 15.26. Article 15.04 of the Code of Criminal Procedure provides that "[t]he affidavit made before the magistrate or district or county attorney is called a 'complaint' if it charges the commission of an offense." Crim. Proc. Code art. 15.04. Case law indicates that a complaint can support the issuance of an arrest warrant. *See Janecka v. State*, 739 S.W.2d 813, 822-23 (Tex. Crim. App. 1987); *Villegas v. State*, 791 S.W.2d 226, 235 (Tex. App.—Corpus Christi 1990, pet. ref'd); *Borsari v. State*, 919 S.W.2d 913, 918 (Tex. App.—Houston [14 Dist.] 1996, pet. ref'd) (discussing well-established principle that complaint in support of arrest warrant need not contain same particularity required of indictment). The exceptions to disclosure found in the Act generally do not apply to information that is made public by other statutes. *See Open Records Decision Nos. 623 at 3 (1994), 525 at 3 (1989)*. Therefore, if the submitted complaint

affidavits were presented to the magistrate in support of the issuance of an arrest warrant, then the department must release them to the requestor pursuant to article 15.26. However, if the complaint affidavits were not so presented, then they are not made public by article 15.26 and are subject to our ruling regarding the remaining 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 section encompasses information protected by other statutes, including section 261.201(a) of the Family Code, which 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). Because the submitted information consists of files, reports, records, communications, or working papers used or developed in an investigation under chapter 261, it is within the scope of section 261.201. You have not indicated that the department 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 remaining documents are confidential pursuant to section 261.201 of the Family Code. *See Open Records Decision No. 440 at 2 (1986) (predecessor statute)*. Accordingly, the department must withhold this information from disclosure under section 552.101 as information made confidential by law.

In summary, if the submitted complaint affidavits were presented to the magistrate in support of the issuance of an arrest warrant, then the department must release them to the requestor pursuant to article 15.26 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. The remaining information must be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 261.201 of the Family 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, 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. 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# 241857

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Gregg E. Lovan
Lovan Roker, P.C.
717 S. Kimball Avenue, Suite 200
Caldwell, Idaho 83605
(w/o enclosures)