ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

February 21, 2006

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

OR2006-01641

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# 245499.

The Houston Fire Department (the "department") received a request for information pertaining to an accident. 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. This section encompasses information protected by other statutes. Access to emergency medical service ("EMS") records is governed by the provisions of the Emergency Medical Services Act, Health and Safety Code sections 773.091-.173. *See* Open Records Decision No. 598 (1991). Section 773.091(b) provides as follows:

> Records of the identity, evaluation, or treatment of a patient by emergency medical services personnel or by a physician providing medical supervision that are created by the emergency medical services personnel or physician or maintained by an emergency medical services provider are confidential and privileged and may not be disclosed except as provided by this chapter.

Health & Safety Code § 773.091(b). This confidentiality provision "does not extend to information regarding the presence, nature of injury or illness, age, sex, occupation, and city of residence of a patient who is receiving emergency medical services. *Id.* § 773.091(g). You inform us that the submitted information consists of EMS records. It does not appear that any of the exceptions to confidentiality in section 773.092 of the Health and Safety Code apply in this instance. Accordingly, except for the types of information listed in section 773.091(g), the department must withhold the submitted EMS records under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 773.091(b) of the Health and Safety 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 ten 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 ten calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,

Robert B. Rapfogel
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

RBR/krl

Ref: ID# 245499

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Jerome O. Fjeld
G. P. Hardy III, P.C.
1177 West Loop South, Suite 700
Houston, Texas 77027
(w/o enclosures)