



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

April 25, 2006

Mr. Brody Shanklin  
Assistant District Attorney  
County of Denton  
P. O. Box 2850  
Denton, Texas 76202

OR2006-04139

Dear Mr. Shanklin:

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# 247363.

The Denton County District Clerk (the "district clerk") received a request for "the names, addresses, and phone numbers of all people in your organizations's database(s) or files that are obligors to a child support order." You contend that the district clerk is not subject to the Act. In the alternative, you claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered your arguments and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.<sup>1</sup>

You note that the Act does not apply to records of the judiciary. Gov't Code § 552.003(B). The purposes and limits of the judiciary exception were construed in *Benavides v. Lee*, 665 S.W.2d 151 (Tex. App.—San Antonio 1983, no writ). The court explained the purpose of the judiciary exception:

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<sup>1</sup>We assume that the "representative sample" of records submitted to this office is truly representative of the requested records as a whole. See Open Records Decision Nos. 499 (1988), 497 (1988). This open records letter does not reach, and therefore does not authorize the withholding of, any other requested records to the extent that those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

The judiciary exception . . . is important to safeguard judicial proceedings and maintain the independence of the judicial branch of government, preserving statutory and case law already governing access to judicial records. But it must not be extended to every governmental entity having any connection with the judiciary.

*Id.* at 152. Thus, to fall within the judiciary exception, the document must contain information that pertains to judicial proceedings. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 527 (1989) (Court Reporters Certification Board not part of judiciary because its records do not pertain to judicial proceedings), 204 (1978) (information held by county judge that does not pertain to proceedings before county court subject to Act).

The records submitted to this office for review relate to judicial proceedings. Because these records are maintained by the district clerk for various Denton County courts, the district clerk need not release them under the Act. Gov't Code § 552.0035 (access to information maintained by or for judiciary is governed by rules adopted by supreme court); *see* TEX. R. JUD. ADMIN. 12 (public access to judicial records); Attorney General Opinion DM-166 (1992).<sup>2</sup>

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

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<sup>2</sup>As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address the exception you have raised.

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,



Matthew T. McLain  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

MM/krl

Ref: ID# 247363

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Darren M. Heizer  
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(w/o enclosures)