



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

May 1, 2006

Mr. Robert J. Davis
Matthews, Stein, Shiels, Pearce, Knott, Eden & Davis, L.L.P.
8131 LBJ Freeway, Suite 700
Dallas, Texas 75251

OR2006-04383

Dear Mr. Davis:

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# 247783.

Collin County (the "county") received three requests for military discharge information for 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.

Section 552.101 excepts from public disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. This exception encompasses the common law right to privacy. Common law privacy protects information that is highly intimate or embarrassing, such that its release would be highly objectionable to a person of ordinary sensibilities, and of no legitimate public interest. *See Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 685 (Tex. 1976). In Open Records Decision No. 169 (1977), this office concluded that under certain "special circumstances," privacy under section 552.101 will protect information that ordinarily would be subject to public disclosure. *Id.* at 6-7. Such "special circumstances" encompass a very narrow set of situations. *Id.* at 6. They do not include a desire for privacy or "a generalized and speculative fear of harassment or retribution." *Id.* On the other hand, they do include situations in which release of the information would likely cause someone to face "an imminent threat of physical danger." *Id.*

We determine whether a request for information presents such "special circumstances" on a case-by-case basis. *Id.* at 7. In this case we find that you have demonstrated the existence of such "special circumstances." Therefore the county must withhold the submitted information, on the basis of special circumstances, under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common law privacy.¹

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

¹Because our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining arguments against disclosure.

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,



Brian J. Rogers
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

BJR/krl

Ref: ID# 247783

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Jimmy D. Littlefield
5812 Oldham Drive
McKinney, Texas 75070
(w/o enclosures)

Mr. Joel Littlefield
8005 Old Mill Road
Greenville, Texas 75402
(w/o enclosures)