



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

November 13, 2006

Mr. Robert Wasson  
Director, Information Technology  
McLennan County  
500 Columbus Avenue  
Waco, Texas 76701-1388

OR2006-13417

Dear Mr. Wasson:

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# 264493.

McLennan County (the "county") received a request for a "list of persons, with address and zip code, who received traffic violations from all justice of the peace courts in [McLennan County] from June 1, 2006 to August 31, 2006." You claim that the information at issue is not subject to the Act. In the alternative, you state that the request requires the county to program or manipulate data. We have considered your arguments and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.<sup>1</sup>

The Act generally requires the disclosure of information maintained by a "governmental body." *See* Gov't Code § 552.021. While the Act's definition of a "governmental body" is broad, it specifically excludes "the judiciary." *See id.* § 552.003(1)(A), (B). A justice of the peace is a member of the judiciary. Open Records Decision No. 25 (1974). You state that the requested information is contained within the justice of the peace database, and is not

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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.

separately maintained by the county. You explain that, with the exception of each justice of the peace on each case, only the county's Information Technology Department can access this information. You further inform us that the individual justices of the peace, and not the county, enter and maintain these records. Based on your representations, we determine that the requested information consists of judicial records. Therefore, the requested information is not subject to public disclosure under the Act. *See* Gov't Code § 552.0035 (access to information maintained by or for judiciary is governed by rules adopted by supreme court); Tex. R. Jud. Admin. 12 (public access to judicial records).<sup>2</sup> We therefore conclude that the county need not release the requested information in response to the present request.

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).

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<sup>2</sup>We note that records of the judiciary may be public under other sources of law. *See* Gov't Code § 29.007(d)(4) (complaints filed with municipal court clerk); *id.* § 29.007(f) (municipal court clerks shall perform duties prescribed by law for county court clerk); Loc. Gov't Code § 191.006 (records belonging to office of county clerk shall be open to public unless access restricted by law or court order); *see also Star-Telegram, Inc. v. Walker*, 834 S.W.2d 54, 57 (Tex. 1992) (documents filed with courts are generally considered public and must be released); Attorney General Opinions DM-166 (1992) at 2-3 (public has general right to inspect and copy judicial records), H-826 (1976); Open Records Decision No. 25 (1974).

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,



Gilbert N. Saenz  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

GNS/sdk

Ref: ID# 264493

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Michael L. Aaronson  
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(w/o enclosures)