



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

January 9, 2007

Mr. Robert L. Dillard, III
Nichols, Jackson, Dillard, Hager & Smith, L.L.P.
1800 Lincoln Plaza
500 North Akard
Dallas, Texas 75201

OR2007-00297

Dear Mr. Dillard:

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# 269375.

The University Park Police Department (the "department"), which you represent, received a request for information pertaining to a specified incident. 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 disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." This section encompasses the doctrine of common-law privacy. Common-law privacy protects information that (1) contains highly intimate or embarrassing facts the publication of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person and (2) is not of legitimate concern to the public. *Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 685 (Tex. 1976). The types of information considered intimate and embarrassing by the Texas Supreme Court in *Industrial Foundation* included information relating to sexual assault, pregnancy, mental or physical abuse in the workplace, illegitimate children, psychiatric treatment of mental disorders, attempted suicide, and injuries to sexual organs. *Id.* at 683.

The submitted documents contain information that is considered highly intimate or embarrassing and is not of legitimate concern to the public. In most cases, the department would be allowed to withhold only this information; however, the requestor knows the identity of the individual involved and the nature of the incident at issue. Withholding only certain details of the incident from the requestor would therefore not preserve the individual's common-law right of privacy. Thus, the submitted information is confidential in its entirety pursuant to common-law privacy. We note, however, that the requestor is the spouse of the individual at issue; accordingly, if the requestor is the authorized representative of the individual at issue, the requestor has a right of access to submitted information pursuant to section 552.023 of the Government Code and it must be released to her. See Gov't Code § 552.023(b) (governmental body may not deny access to person or person's representative to whom information relates on grounds that information is considered confidential under privacy principles). If the requestor does not have a right of access to the submitted information pursuant to section 552.023, then the department must withhold the information 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.* § 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).

¹As our ruling is dispositive, we do not address your other arguments for exception of this information.

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. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. 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,



James L. Coggeshall
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JLC/jww

Ref: ID# 269375

Enc. Submitted documents