



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

June 7, 2007

Ms. YuShan Chang
Assistant City Attorney
City of Houston
P.O. Box 368
Houston, Texas 77001-0368

OR2007-07138

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# 280489.

The Houston Fire Department (the "department") received two requests for several categories of information, including all complaints received by the department since January 1, 2006. You state you are releasing some information to the requestor, but claim that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code.¹ 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, such as section 143.1214 of the Local Government Code. Section 143.1214 provides in relevant part:

¹ To the extent any additional responsive information existed on the date the department received this request, we assume you have released it. If you have not released any such records, you must do so at this time. See Gov't Code §§ 552.301(a), .302; see also Open Records Decision No. 664 (2000) (if governmental body concludes that no exceptions apply to requested information, it must release information as soon as possible).

(b) The department shall maintain an investigatory file that relates to a disciplinary action against a fire fighter or police officer that was overturned on appeal, or any document in the possession of the department that relates to a charge of misconduct against a fire fighter or police officer, regardless of whether the charge is sustained, only in a file created by the department for the department's use. The department may only release information in those investigatory files or documents relating to a charge of misconduct:

- (1) to another law enforcement agency or fire department;
- (2) to the office of a district or United States attorney; or
- (3) in accordance with Subsection (c).

(c) The department head or the department head's designee may forward a document that relates to disciplinary action against a fire fighter or police officer to the director or the director's designee for inclusion in the fire fighter's or police officer's personnel file maintained under Sections 143.089(a)-(f) only if:

- (1) disciplinary action was actually taken against the fire fighter or police officer;
- (2) the document shows the disciplinary action taken; and
- (3) the document includes at least a brief summary of the facts on which the disciplinary action was based.

Local Gov't Code § 143.1214(b)-(c). You state that portions of the submitted information, Exhibits 2, 4, 5, and 7, relate to investigations that did not result in disciplinary action. Thus, you indicate that this information is maintained by the department in a departmental file and is not part of the fire fighters' civil service personnel files. *See id.* § 143.1214(c); *see also id.* § 143.089(a)-(f). Based on your representations and our review, we conclude that Exhibits 2, 4, 5, and 7 are excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 143.1214 of the Local Government Code. *See also* Open Records Decision No. 642 (1996) (concluding that files relating to investigations of Houston Fire Department personnel by Public Integrity Review Group of Houston Police Department were confidential under section 143.1214).

You state that the remaining submitted information, Exhibits 3, 6, and 8, relate to investigations that did result in disciplinary action. You further state that this information is maintained by the department in a departmental file. You also state that the department has forwarded the documents meeting the requirements of section 143.1214(c) to the fire

fighters' personnel files maintained under section 143.089(a). However, you state that the remaining information does not meet all of the conditions of section 143.1214(c) for inclusion in the fire fighters' civil service files. Based on your representations, we conclude that Exhibits 3, 6, and 8 are also excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 143.1214 of the Local Government Code. *See* ORD 642.

In summary, the department must withhold the submitted information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 143.1214 of the Local Government 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 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).

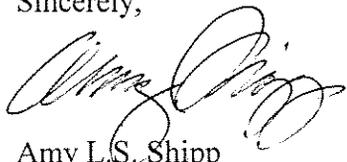
If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

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 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,



Amy L.S. Shipp
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

ALS/mcf

Ref: ID# 280489

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Steve Bivens
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(w/o enclosures)