



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

July 2, 2007

Mr. W. Montgomery Meitler
Assistant Counsel
Office of Legal Services
Texas Education Agency
1701 North Congress Avenue
Austin, Texas 78701-1494

OR2007-08393

Dear Mr. Meitler:

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# 283088.

The Texas Education Agency (the "agency") received a request for copies of complaints, investigations, and correspondence from a specified period of time relating to Keller Independent School District. You state that the agency is withholding information that is protected under the federal Family Education Rights and Privacy Act. You also state that a portion of the requested information will be released to the requestor. You claim that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.116 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.¹

Initially, you inform us that some of the responsive information was the subject of a previous request for information, in response to which this office issued Open Records Letter

¹We 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.

No. 2007-08317 (2007). With regard to information in the current request that is identical to the information previously requested and ruled upon by this office, we conclude that, as we have no indication that the law, facts, and circumstances on which the prior ruling was based have changed, the agency may continue to rely on this ruling as a previous determination. *See* Open Records Decision No. 673 (2001) (so long as law, facts, and circumstances on which prior ruling was based have not changed, first type of previous determination exists where requested information is precisely same information as was addressed in prior attorney general ruling, ruling is addressed to same governmental body, and ruling concludes that information is or is not excepted from disclosure).

Next, we consider the agency's claim under section 552.116 of the Government Code for the submitted information. Section 552.116 provides as follows:

(a) An audit working paper of an audit of the state auditor or the auditor of a state agency, an institution of higher education as defined by Section 61.003, Education Code, a county, a municipality, or a joint board operating under Section 22.074, Transportation Code, is excepted from the requirements of Section 552.021. If information in an audit working paper is also maintained in another record, that other record is not excepted from the requirements of Section 552.021 by this section.

(b) In this section:

(1) "Audit" means an audit authorized or required by a statute of this state or the United States, the charter or an ordinance of a municipality, an order of the commissioners court of a county, or a resolution or other action of a joint board described by Subsection (a) and includes an investigation.

(2) "Audit working paper" includes all information, documentary or otherwise, prepared or maintained in conducting an audit or preparing an audit report, including:

(A) intra-agency and interagency communications; and

(B) drafts of the audit report or portions of those drafts.

Gov't Code § 552.116. You state that the submitted information consists of "audit working papers prepared and maintained by [the agency]'s Division of School Governance and General Inquiries in conjunction with an audit of the Keller Independent School District." You explain that this investigation is authorized by section 39.075(a)(6) of the Education Code. *See* Educ. Code § 39.075 (listing circumstances in which the commissioner shall authorize investigations). Based on your arguments and our review, we agree that the

submitted information constitutes audit working papers. Accordingly, the agency may withhold this information under section 552.116.

In summary, (1) the agency may continue to rely on *Open Records Letter No. 2007-08317* with regard to the requested information that is the subject of that ruling and (2) the submitted information may be withheld under section 552.116 of the 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Alan Akin", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

M. Alan Akin
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

MAA/jb

Ref: ID# 283088

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Jim Maine
1614 Brentwood Trail
Keller, Texas 76248
(w/o enclosures)