



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

September 5, 2007

Ms. M. Ann Montgomery
Assistant County & District Attorney
County of Ellis
Temporary Administration Building
1201 North Highway 77, Suite 104
Waxahachie, Texas 75165-7832

OR2007-11561

Dear Ms. Montgomery:

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# 288479.

The Ellis County Clerk (the "county clerk") received a request for records of "misdemeanor dispositions (no filings) available electronically with all data considered public information." The requestor seeks the defendant's name, race, sex, age, date of birth, case/sequence number, charge class, charge description, statute, disposition date, disposition description, sentence date, sentence description, and fine amount. You claim that the submitted information is not subject to the Act. In the alternative, you claim that the county clerk is not a governmental body under the Act. We have considered the arguments you make and reviewed the submitted information.

You state that the information in the submitted reports is "used by the Clerk in preparation of monthly reports for the Office of Court Administration, which is an agent of the judiciary." You also state that the information in this database is information collected, assembled, or maintained for the judiciary and is not public information under the Act. Upon review of your arguments and the information at issue, we agree that the information at issue consists of records held by the county clerk as the agent of the judiciary. Records

of the judiciary are not subject to required public disclosure under the Act.¹ See Gov't Code §§ 552.003(1)(A), (B) (definition of "governmental body" under Act specifically excludes the judiciary), .021 (Act generally requires disclosure of information maintained by "governmental body"). We therefore conclude the county clerk need not release the submitted information in response to the present request. We note that "[a]ccess to information collected, assembled, or maintained . . . for the judiciary is governed by rules adopted by the Supreme Court of Texas. *Id.* § 552.0035(a); see Tex. R. Jud. Admin. 12.

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).

¹Records of the judiciary may be public pursuant to other sources of law. Attorney General Opinions DM-166 at 2-3 1992) (public has general right to inspect and copy judicial records), H-826 (1976); Open Records Decision No. 25 (1974); see *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).

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". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

M. Alan Akin
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

MAA/mcf

Ref: ID# 288479

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Stephani Padgett
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(w/o enclosures)