ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

November 21, 2007

Mr. Ernesto Rodriguez
Assistant City Attorney
City of El Paso
2 Civic Center Plaza, 9th Floor
El Paso, Texas 79901

OR2007-15330

Dear Mr. Rodriguez:

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# 298040.

The El Paso Police Department (the "department") received a request for a specified sexual-assault offense report. 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 of the Government Code 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, which protects information that is highly intimate or embarrassing such that its release would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person and the public has no legitimate interest in it. *Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668 (Tex. 1976). The types of information considered intimate and embarrassing by the Texas Supreme Court in *Industrial Foundation* include 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.

Generally, only the information that either identifies or tends to identify a victim of sexual assault or other sex-related offense may be withheld under common-law privacy. However,

a governmental body is required to withhold an entire report when identifying information is inextricably intertwined with other releasable information or when the requestor knows the identity of the alleged victim. *See* Open Records Decisions Nos. 393 (1983), 339 (1982); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 440 (1986) (detailed descriptions of serious sexual offenses must be withheld). You state that the requestor knows the identity of the alleged victim in the submitted offense report. Based on this representation, we agree that withholding only the identifying information from the requestor would not preserve the victim's common-law right to privacy. We therefore conclude that the department must withhold the submitted information in its entirety pursuant to the common-law privacy principles incorporated by section 552.101 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,

James L. Coggeshall
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JLC/jh

Ref: ID# 298040

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Alberto Ponce de Leon
1801 Texas
El Paso, Texas 79901
(w/o enclosures)