



**KEN PAXTON**  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

July 31, 2015

Ms. Cary Grace  
Assistant City Attorney  
City of Austin  
P.O. Box 1088  
Austin, Texas 78767-8828

OR2015-15685

Dear Ms. Grace:

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# 577374 (PIR# 812265).

The City of Austin and Austin Police Department (collectively, the "city") received a request for the complete investigative file for a specified incident and all records related to a named individual and the circumstances surrounding his death. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.<sup>1</sup>

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 section 143.089 of the Local Government Code. The City of Austin is a civil service city under chapter 143 of the Local Government Code. Section 143.089 provides for the existence of two different types of personnel files relating to a police officer: one that must be maintained as part of the officer's civil service file and another the police department may maintain for its own internal use. *See* Local Gov't Code § 143.089(a), (g). The officer's civil service file must contain certain specified items, including commendations, periodic evaluations by the police officer's supervisor, and documents relating to any misconduct in which the department took disciplinary action against the officer under chapter 143 of the Local Government Code. *Id.* § 143.089(a)(1)-(2).

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<sup>1</sup>We 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.

Chapter 143 prescribes the following types of disciplinary actions: removal, suspension, demotion, and uncompensated duty. *Id.* §§ 143.051-.055; *see* Attorney General Opinion JC-0257 (2000) (written reprimand is not disciplinary action for purposes of Local Gov't Code chapter 143).

In cases in which a police department investigates a police officer's misconduct and takes disciplinary action against an officer, it is required by section 143.089(a)(2) to place all investigatory records relating to the investigation and disciplinary action, including background documents such as complaints, witness statements, and documents of like nature from individuals who were not in a supervisory capacity, in the police officer's civil service file maintained under section 143.089(a). *See Abbott v. Corpus Christi*, 109 S.W.3d 113, 122 (Tex. App.—Austin 2003, no pet.). All investigatory materials in a case resulting in disciplinary action are "from the employing department" when they are held by or are in the possession of the department because of its investigation into a police officer's misconduct, and the department must forward them to the civil service commission for placement in the civil service personnel file.<sup>2</sup> *Id.* Such records may not be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 143.089 of the Local Government Code. *See* Local Gov't Code § 143.089(f); Open Records Decision No. 562 at 6 (1990). However, information maintained in a police department's internal file pursuant to section 143.089(g) is confidential and must not be released. *City of San Antonio v. Tex. Attorney Gen.*, 851 S.W.2d 946, 949 (Tex. App.—Austin 1993, writ denied).

You state the information you have marked is held in the department's confidential internal files for the officers in question pursuant to section 143.089(g). You state the information at issue pertains to an internal investigation in which no disciplinary action has been taken against the officers involved. Upon review, we agree the information you have marked is confidential under section 143.089(g) of the Local Government Code and, therefore, must be withheld from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code.

Section 552.108(a) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "[i]nformation held by a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime . . . if: (1) release of the information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime[.]" Gov't Code § 552.108(a)(1). A governmental body claiming section 552.108(a)(1) must reasonably explain how and why the release of the information at issue would interfere with law enforcement. *See id.* §§ 552.108(a)(1), .301(e)(1)(A); *see also Ex parte Pruitt*, 551 S.W.2d 706, 710 (Tex. 1977). You state the information you have marked relates to an ongoing criminal investigation. Based on this representation, we conclude the release of the information at issue would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime. *See Houston Chronicle Publ'g Co. v. City of Houston*, 531 S.W.2d 177, 186-87 (Tex. Civ. App.—Houston [14th

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<sup>2</sup>Section 143.089(g) requires a police or fire department that receives a request for information maintained in a file under section 143.089(g) to refer that person to the civil service director or the director's designee.

Dist.] 1975) (delineating law enforcement interests present in active cases), *writ ref'd n.r.e. per curiam*, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976). Therefore, section 552.108(a)(1) is applicable to the information you have marked.

However, section 552.108 does not except from disclosure basic information about an arrested person, an arrest, or a crime. Gov't Code § 552.108(c). Basic information refers to the information held to be public in *Houston Chronicle*. See 531 S.W.2d at 186-88; Open Records Decision No. 127 at 3-4 (1976) (summarizing types of information deemed public by *Houston Chronicle*). Thus, with the exception of basic information, the city may withhold the information you have marked under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.

In summary, the city must withhold the information you have marked under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 143.089(g) of the Local Government Code. With the exception of basic information, which must be released, the city may withhold the information you have marked under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular information 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 information or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For more information concerning those rights and responsibilities, please visit our website at [http://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open/orl\\_ruling\\_info.shtml](http://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open/orl_ruling_info.shtml), or call the Office of the Attorney General's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for providing public information under the Act may be directed to the Office of the Attorney General, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,



Brian E. Berger  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

BB/akg

Ref: ID# 577374

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)