OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL - STATE OF TEXAS
JOHN CORNYN

August 21, 2000

Mr. Eddie Trevino, Jr.
Magallanes, Hinojosa & Trevino, P.C.
Post Office Box 4901
Brownsville, Texas 78520

OR2000-3202

Dear Mr. Trevino:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 139303.

The Point Isabel Independent School District (the "district"), which you represent, received a request for information related to former district employees. You claim that requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.102 and 552.024[1] of the Government Code.[2]

Section 552.117 excepts from disclosure the home addresses, telephone numbers, social security numbers, and family information of current or former officials or employees of a governmental body who request that this information be kept confidential under section 552.024. Therefore, section 552.117 allows you to withhold this information if the individual requested that this information be kept confidential under section 552.024. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 622 (1994), 455 (1987). You may not, however, withhold this information if the individual made the request for confidentiality under section 552.024 after this request for information was made. Whether a particular piece of information is public

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[1]Although you assert 552.024 as excepting from disclosure certain employee information, this section allows for governmental body employees to elect to have specific personal information kept confidential. The appropriate section to cite to raise an exception to disclosure of such information is section 552.117 of the Government Code.

[2]You indicate that the requestor "does not set forth or state that he is the authorized representative or that he is authorized to receive any information with regards to any employee or prior employee of the [district]." The Public Information Act does not require such a showing. *See* Gov't Code § 552.001(a) (policy of state that each person is entitled, unless otherwise expressly provided by law, at all times to complete information about affairs of government and official acts of public officials and employees).

must be determined at the time the request for it is made. *See* Open Records Decision No. 530 at 5 (1989). To the extent the district's former employees elected, prior to the date the district's received the request for information, to have their addresses and social security numbers withheld from disclosure, the district's must withhold such information under section 552.117(1).

You have not submitted for our review the information that is responsive to the request. Pursuant to section 552.301(e), a governmental body is required to submit to this office within fifteen business days of receiving an open records request a copy of the specific information requested or representative samples, labeled to indicate which exceptions apply to which parts of the documents. Pursuant to section 552.302 of the Government Code, a governmental body's failure to submit to this office the information required in section 552.301(e) results in the legal presumption that the information is public and must be released. Information that is presumed public must be released unless a governmental body demonstrates a compelling reason to withhold the information to overcome this presumption. *See Hancock v. State Bd. of Ins.*, 797 S.W.2d 379, 381-82 (Tex. App.--Austin 1990, no writ) (governmental body must make compelling demonstration to overcome presumption of openness pursuant to statutory predecessor to Gov't Code § 552.302); Open Records Decision No. 319 (1982). Because you have not submitted the information for our review, we have no basis for finding it confidential. Thus, we have no choice but to order the remaining information released per section 552.302. If you believe the information is confidential and may not lawfully be released, you must challenge the ruling in court as outlined below. We caution that the distribution of confidential information constitutes a criminal offense. Gov't Code § 552.352.

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, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the

governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, 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 Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.--Austin 1992, no writ).

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,

Carla Gay Dickson

Carla Gay Dickson
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CGD/ljp

Ref: ID# 139303

cc: Mr. Kevin Howard
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