



January 9, 2001

Mr. James L. Hall  
Assistant General Counsel  
Texas Department of Criminal Justice  
P.O. Box 4004  
Huntsville, Texas 77342

OR2001-0092

Dear Mr. Hall:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Public Information Act, chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 142983.

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (the "department") received a request for information relating to the department's investigation of a named inmate's life endangerment transfer request. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.107, and 552.131 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and have reviewed the information you submitted.

Section 552.131 of the Government Code relates to information about inmates of the department. Section 552.131 provides in relevant part:

- (a) Except as provided by Subsection (b) or by Section 552.029 [of the Government Code], information obtained or maintained by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice is excepted from [required public disclosure] if it is information about an inmate who is confined in a facility operated by or under a contract with the department.

Gov't Code § 552.131(a).<sup>1</sup> Section 552.029 of the Government Code provides in relevant part:

Notwithstanding . . . Section 552.131, the following information about an inmate who is confined in a facility operated by or under a contract with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice is subject to required disclosure[:]

. . .

(8) basic information regarding the death of an inmate in custody, an incident involving the use of force, or an alleged crime involving the inmate.

Gov't Code § 552.029(8). Thus, the legislature explicitly made section 552.131 subject to section 552.029. Pursuant to section 552.029(8), "basic information" regarding "an alleged crime involving the inmate" is subject to required disclosure. You inform this office that the requested information relates to a life endangerment investigation. You state that the inmate identified by the requestor "filed a life endangerment request which resulted in a unit investigation into the facts of the situation." Having carefully reviewed the submitted information, we believe that it relates to a terroristic threat against the inmate. *See* Pen. Code § 22.07. Therefore, as the submitted information relates to an alleged crime involving the inmate, basic information about the alleged crime is subject to required disclosure under section 552.029(8). The basic information that is subject to disclosure under section 552.029(8) includes the time and place of the incident, the names of inmates and of department employees who were involved, a brief narrative of the incident, a brief description of any injuries sustained by anyone involved, and information regarding any criminal charges or disciplinary actions that were filed as a result of the incident. The submitted information that is not subject to required disclosure under section 552.029 is excepted from disclosure under section 552.131.

You also raise section 552.107(2) of the Government Code in conjunction with the decision in *Ruiz v. Estelle*, 503 F. Supp. 1265 (S.D. Tex. 1980), *aff'd in part and rev'd in part*, 679 F.2d 1115, *amended in part and vacated in part, reh'g denied*, 688 F.2d 266 (5<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1982), *cert. denied*, 460 U.S. 1042 (1983). Section 552.107(2) provides that information is excepted from required public disclosure if "a court by order has prohibited disclosure of the information." Gov't Code § 552.107(2). The Stipulated Modification of the Amended Decree in the *Ruiz* case restricts the dissemination of "sensitive information" regarding inmates. *See* Open Records Decision No. 560 (1990). However, the final judgment in *Ruiz*,

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<sup>1</sup>Section 552.131(b), which is not applicable to the information in question here, provides that section 552.131(a) does not apply to "statistical or other aggregated information relating to inmates confined in one or more facilities operated by or under a contract with the department" or "information about an inmate sentenced to death."

entered on December 11, 1992, gives the Texas Board of Criminal Justice (the "board") authority to define the term "sensitive information." On January 21, 2000, the board met and, acting under the authority of the final judgment in *Ruiz*, determined that "the term 'Sensitive Information' shall include all information regarding TDCJ-ID offenders not required to be disclosed pursuant to Section 552.029, Government Code." Thus, the board has determined that information that is subject to disclosure under section 552.029(8) of the Government Code is not "sensitive information" that the department may withhold from the public under section 552.107(2) in conjunction with the *Ruiz* decision.

In summary, basic information about the alleged crime involving the inmate is subject to required disclosure under section 552.029(8) of the Government Code. The basic information that is subject to disclosure under section 552.029 may not be withheld under section 552.107(2). The rest of the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.131. As we are able to make this determination, we need not address section 552.101.

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).

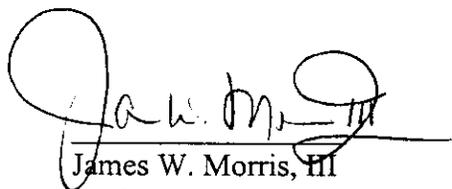
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following 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).

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 General Services Commission 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 "James W. Morris, III". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

James W. Morris, III  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

JWM/er

Ref: ID# 142983

Encl: Submitted documents

cc: Ms. Patricia Jones  
2516 Peabody Avenue  
Dallas, Texas 75215  
(w/o enclosures)