OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL · STATE OF TEXAS
JOHN CORNYN

April 12, 2001

Mr. John Steiner
Division Chief
City of Austin - Law Department
P.O. Box 96
Austin, Texas 78767-96

OR2001-1471

Dear Mr. Steiner:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 145928.

The Austin Emergency Medical Services Department (the "department") received a request for "any all records, reports, photographs, documents, recordings, and any and all things pertaining to the automobile accident which occurred on December 8, 2000, at approximately 1:30 a.m. at 10th Street and Congress, . . . involving David M. Adams a passenger of one of the vehicles involved." In addition, the requestor seeks "the names of all responding emergency personnel." You state you are releasing most of the documents responsive to the request, but that the EMS records concerning John Betts, the driver of the car, are excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 773.091 of the Health and Safety Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.101 excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Section 552.101 encompasses confidentiality provisions such as section 773.091 of the Health and Safety Code. Section 773.091 provides in part:

> (b) Records of the identity, evaluation, or treatment of a patient by emergency medical services personnel or by a physician providing medical supervision that are created by the emergency medical services personnel or physician or maintained by

> an emergency medical services provider are confidential and privileged and may not be disclosed except as provided by this chapter.

This confidentiality "does not extend to information regarding the presence, nature of injury or illness, age, sex, occupation, and city of residence of a patient who is receiving emergency medical services." *Id.* § 773.091(g). It does not appear that any of the exceptions to confidentiality set forth in section 773.092 of the Health and Safety Code apply in this instance. Accordingly, the department must withhold the submitted EMS records under section 552.101 of the Government Code, except for information required to be released under section 773.091(g).

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).

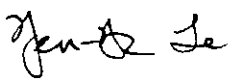
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following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



Yen-Ha Le
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

YHL/DBF/seg

Ref: ID# 145928

Encl. Submitted documents

cc: Mr. James F. Twombly
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Austin, Texas 78734-3602
(w/o enclosures)