OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL · STATE OF TEXAS
JOHN CORNYN

January 29, 2002

Mr. John M. Hill
Cowles & Thompson
901 Main Street, Suite 4000
Dallas, Texas 75202-3793

OR2002-0428

Dear Mr. Hill:

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# 160000.

The City of Addison Police Department, which your firm represents, received a request for a copy of a file concerning alleged child abuse. You contend that this information is exempt from disclosure under section 261.201 of the Family Code as incorporated by 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions 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." Section 261.201 of the Family Code reads in part as follows:

> (a) The following information is confidential, is not subject to public release under Chapter 552, Government Code, and may be disclosed only for purposes consistent with this code and applicable federal or state law or under rules adopted by an investigating agency:
>
> > (1) a report of alleged or suspected abuse or neglect made under this chapter and the identity of the person making the report; and

> (2) except as otherwise provided in this section, the files, reports, records, communications, audiotapes, videotapes, and working papers used or developed in an investigation under this chapter or in providing services as a result of an investigation.

We believe that the requested information consists of reports, records, and working papers used or developed in an investigation made under chapter 261 of the Family Code. You inform us that the department has not adopted any rules with regard to the release of this type of information. In the absence of any rule to the contrary, the requested information is confidential in accordance with section 261.201 of the Family Code. *See* Open Records Decision No. 440 at 2 (1986) (construing predecessor statute). Accordingly, you must not release the requested information to the requestor.[1]

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;

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[1]We note that if the investigation has been referred to the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (the "department"), a parent who is a requestor may be entitled to access to the department's records. Section 261.201(g) of the Family Code provides that the department, upon request and subject to its own rules:

> shall provide to the parent, managing conservator, or other legal representative of a child who is the subject of reported abuse or neglect information concerning the reported abuse or neglect that would otherwise be confidential under this section if the department has edited the information to protect the confidentiality of the identity of the person who made the report and any other person whose life or safety may be endangered by the disclosure.

Fam. Code § 261.201(g).

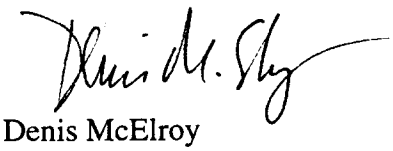
2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things 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 of the Texas Building and Procurement 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,



Denis McElroy
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

DMc/seg

Ref: ID# 160000

Encl. Submitted documents

cc: Mr. Frank Shor
1620 East Belt Line Road
Carrollton, Texas 75006
(w/o enclosures)