OFFICE *of the* ATTORNEY GENERAL
GREG ABBOTT

December 5, 2002

Ms. Tamara Pitts
Assistant City Attorney
City of Fort Worth
1000 Throckmorton Street
Fort Worth, Texas 76102

OR2002-6912

Dear Ms. Pitts:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 173208.

The City of Fort Worth (the "city") received a request for Officer Cecil Jackson Hash III's personnel file, as well as any investigation files regarding complaints filed against Officer Hash that resulted in disciplinary action. You state that the city has released Officer Hash's human resources file and civil service file. You claim, however, that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

You contend that the requested information is made confidential under section 143.089(g) of the Local Government Code and must therefore be withheld from the public pursuant to section 552.101 of the Government Code.[1] Section 143.089 provides in pertinent part:

> (a) The director [of the fire fighters' and police officers' civil service] or the director's designee shall maintain a personnel file on each fire fighter and police officer. The personnel file must contain any letter, memorandum, or document relating to:
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> . . . .
>
> (2) any misconduct by the fire fighter or the police officer if the letter, memorandum, or document is from the employing department

[1]Section 552.101 of the Government Code protects "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision."

> and if the misconduct resulted in disciplinary action by the employing department in accordance with this chapter; and
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> . . . .
>
> (c) A letter, memorandum, or document relating to disciplinary action taken against the fire fighter or police officer or to alleged misconduct by the fire fighter or police officer that is placed in the person's personnel file as provided by Subsection (a)(2) shall be removed from the employee's file if the commission finds that:
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> (1) the disciplinary action was taken without just cause; or
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> (2) the charge of misconduct was not supported by sufficient evidence.
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> . . . .
>
> (f) The director or the director's designee may not release any information contained in a fire fighter's or police officer's personnel file without first obtaining the person's written permission, unless the release of the information is required by law.
>
> (g) A fire or police department may maintain a personnel file on a fire fighter or police officer employed by the department for the department's use, but the department may not release any information contained in the department file to any agency or person requesting information relating to a fire fighter or police officer. The department shall refer to the director or the director's designee a person or agency that requests information that is maintained in the fire fighter's or police officer's personnel file.

In Open Records Decision No. 562 (1990), this office discussed the confidentiality of personnel file information maintained by cities that have adopted the police officers' civil service law in accordance with the provisions of chapter 143 of the Local Government Code. Section 143.089 of the Local Government Code provides for the creation of two personnel files: one that is maintained by the city's civil service director and the other by the city police department.

Section 143.089(a) specifies certain types of information that must be contained in the civil service file; such records are not made confidential under section 143.089 and are subject to release unless an exception to required public disclosure applies. *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. Texas Attorney General*, 851 S.W.2d 946, 949 (Tex. App.--Austin 1993, writ denied).

A police officer's disciplinary records must be contained in the civil service file only if the misconduct results in disciplinary action by the police department "in accordance with this chapter." Local Gov't Code § 143.089(a)(2). Otherwise, those records must be maintained as part of the police department's internal file contemplated under section 143.089(g). *See generally* Attorney General Opinion JC-0257 (2000).

You assert that Exhibit C contains personnel information maintained by the Fort Worth Police Department (the "department") as authorized under section 143.089(g) of the Local Government Code. A review of the submitted information reveals that it does not relate to disciplinary action as defined under chapter 143. *See* Local Gov't Code §§ 143.051-.055 (removal, suspension, demotion, and uncompensated duty). Thus, we conclude that Exhibit C is confidential pursuant to section 143.089(g) of the Local Government Code and must be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code.

You ask this office to issue a previous determination authorizing the city to withhold similar information in similar cases in the future. We decline to issue a previous determination at this time allowing the city to withhold the general category of information requested in this case in the future. *See* Open Records Decision No. 673 (2001).

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 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. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. 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,

Karen A. Eckerle
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

KAE/sdk

Ref: ID# 173208

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Mr. James T. Curtis
313 Main Street
Fort Worth, Texas 76102
(w/o enclosures)