



OFFICE *of the* ATTORNEY GENERAL
GREG ABBOTT

February 26, 2003

Mr. Oscar G. Treviño
Walsh, Anderson, Brown, Schulze & Aldridge, P.C.
P.O. Box 2156
Austin, Texas 78768

OR2003-1218

Dear Mr. Treviño:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 177012.

The Marfa Independent School District (the “district”), which you represent, received a request for information regarding the district’s separation agreement with a former district athletic director, and information regarding legal fees relating to the agreement. You state that the district has provided some responsive information to the requestor. You ask whether any of the remaining requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 or section 552.102 of the Government Code.¹ We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.102 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure “information in a personnel file, the disclosure of which would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy.” Gov’t Code § 552.102(a). In *Hubert v. Harte-Hanks Texas Newspapers*, 652 S.W.2d 546 (Tex. App.—Austin 1983, writ ref’d n.r.e.), the court ruled that the test to

¹ You also ask whether the submitted information is confidential by virtue of section 552.305 of the Government Code. Section 552.305 is not an exception to disclosure under the Public Information Act, but rather is a procedural provision permitting an interested third party to submit to the attorney general reasons why requested information should not be released. Gov’t Code § 552.305; *see also* Open Records Decision No. 542 (1990) (determining that statutory predecessor to Gov’t Code § 552.305 permits governmental body to rely on interested third party to raise and explain applicability of exception in Public Information Act in certain circumstances). As of the date of this letter, this office has not received comments from the third party individual at issue explaining why the requested information should not be released.

be applied to information claimed to be protected under section 552.102 is the same as the test formulated by the Texas Supreme Court in *Industrial Foundation* for information claimed to be protected under the doctrine of common-law privacy as incorporated by section 552.101 of the Act. *See Industrial Found. v. Texas Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 683-85 (Tex. 1976), *cert. denied*, 430 U.S. 931 (1977). Accordingly, we will consider your privacy claim under section 552.101 in conjunction with section 552.102.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts “information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision.” Section 552.101 also encompasses the doctrine of common-law privacy. Common-law privacy protects information if (1) the information contains highly intimate or embarrassing facts the publication of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person, and (2) the information is not of legitimate concern to the public. *Industrial Found. v. Texas Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 685 (Tex. 1976), *cert. denied*, 430 U.S. 931 (1977). This office has found that personal financial information is generally excepted from required public disclosure under common-law privacy. Open Records Decision Nos. 600 (1992) (employee’s decisions regarding voluntary benefits programs protected under common-law privacy), 545 (1990). This office has also ruled, however, that the public has a legitimate interest in the essential facts about a financial transaction between an individual and a governmental body. *See* Open Records Decision No. 600 (1992) (information revealing that employee participates in group insurance plan funded partly or wholly by governmental body is not excepted from disclosure). We have marked personal financial information that the district must withhold under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with common-law privacy. We find, however, that the remainder of the responsive information is not highly intimate and embarrassing, and is subject to a legitimate public interest. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 444 at 5-6 (1986) (public has interest in public employee’s qualifications and performance and the circumstances of his resignation or termination), 423 at 2 (1984) (scope of public employee privacy is narrow). Accordingly, we determine that the remainder of the information is not confidential under the doctrine of common-law privacy. We therefore conclude that the district must release the remaining responsive information to the requestor.

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 Dep't of Pub. 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,



David R. Saldivar
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

DRS/seg

Ref: ID# 177012

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Mr. Robert Louis Halpern
La Frontera Publications, Inc.
110 North Highland Avenue, Drawer P
Marfa, Texas 79843
(w/o enclosures)