OFFICE *of the* ATTORNEY GENERAL
GREG ABBOTT

April 22, 2003

Ms. Melissa L. Barloco
Assistant County Attorney
Harris County
1019 Congress, 15th Floor
Houston, Texas 77002-1700

OR2003-2657

Dear Ms. Barloco:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 179753.

The Harris County Constable, Precinct 4 (the "constable") received a written request for all information pertaining to a particular case number. You contend that the requested information is excepted from required disclosure pursuant to sections 552.101 and 552.108 of the Government Code.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from public disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, *statutory*, or by judicial decision." (Emphasis added.) We note that the submitted offense report pertains to, among other things, an alleged instance of "injury to a child." Section 261.201(a) of the Family Code provides:

> 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 [of a child] 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.*

Fam. Code § 261.201 (emphasis added). Because the information at issue pertains to an investigation of an injury to a child, this office concludes that the submitted offense report is made confidential under section 261.201 of the Family Code. You have not informed this office of any rules the constable has adopted that would permit access to the requested records. This office therefore concludes that the constable must withhold the submitted offense report in its entirety pursuant to section 261.201 of the Family Code.[1] *But see* Fam. Code § 261.201(b) (provision for court ordered access), (f) (limited right of access to records held by Department of Protective and Regulatory Services).

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

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[1]We note that although the city did not request an open records decision from this office within the ten business days following the city's receipt of the open records request, the confidentiality conferred on these records by section 261.201 of the Family Code constitutes a "compelling" reason for non-disclosure that overcomes the legal presumption that the records are public information. *See* Gov't Code § 552.302; Open Records Decision No. 150 (1977).

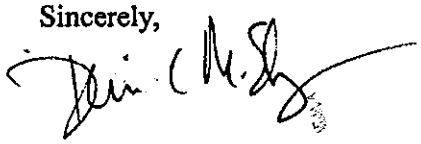
should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

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,



Denis C. McElroy
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

DCM/RWP/seg

Ref: ID# 179753

Enc: Submitted documents