OFFICE *of the* ATTORNEY GENERAL
GREG ABBOTT

July 1, 2003

Mr. James M. Frazier III
Assistant General Counsel
Texas Department of Criminal Justice
P.O. Box 4004
Huntsville, Texas 77342-4004

OR2003-4492

Dear Mr. Frazier:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 183459.

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (the "department") received a request for the interview questions, including the preferred and actual responses, related to a specified employment posting. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.117 and 552.122 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.122(b) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure test items developed by a licensing agency or governmental body. In Open Records Decision No. 626 (1994), this office determined that the term "test item" in section 552.122 includes any standard means by which an individual's or group's knowledge or ability in a particular area is evaluated, but does not encompass evaluations of an employee's overall job performance or suitability. Whether information falls within the section 552.122 exception must be determined on a case-by-case basis. Open Records Decision No. 626 at 6 (1994). Traditionally, this office has applied section 552.122 where release of "test items" might compromise the effectiveness of future examinations. *Id.* at 4-5; *see also* Open Records Decision No. 118 (1976). Additionally, when answers to test questions might reveal the questions themselves, the answers may be withheld under section 552.122(b). *See* Open Records Decision No. 626 at 8 (1994).

You contend that the submitted interview questions are excepted from disclosure under section 552.122(b). You state that "most vacant employee positions are filled through a selection process that includes structured interviews in which the same specific questions are asked of all the applicants who get to the interview stage" and that "the questions are

intended to display the technical expertise of the applicant." Additionally, you explain that "[s]ince there is always turnover and positions come open from time to time, [the department] like[s] to be able to use similar questions from selection to selection." Having considered your arguments and reviewed the submitted information, we agree that the interview questions constitute "test items" as contemplated by section 552.122(b). We also find that the preferred and actual responses to these questions may reveal the questions themselves. Accordingly, the department may withhold the interview questions and their respective preferred and actual answers pursuant to section 552.122(b) of the Government Code.

You also assert section 552.117(3) of the Government Code. Section 552.117(3) requires that the department withhold the home address and telephone number, social security number, and family member information of department employees. However, under section 552.023 of the Government Code a person or a person's authorized representative has a special right of access to records that contain information relating to the person that are protected from public disclosure by laws intended to protect that person's privacy interests. Therefore, the requestor has a special right of access to her social security number, and it must be released in this instance.

In summary, we conclude that the department may withhold the submitted interview questions and their respective preferred and actual answers pursuant to section 552.122(b) of the Government Code. All remaining information must be released in this instance.

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,

W. Montgomery Meitler
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

WMM/lmt

Ref: ID# 183459

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Ms. Ridie Verdone
267 Cedar Point
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(w/o enclosures)