



OFFICE *of the* ATTORNEY GENERAL
GREG ABBOTT

July 9, 2003

Ms. Chris G. Elizalde
Walsh, Anderson, Brown, Schulze & Aldridge, P.C.
P.O. Box 2156
Austin, Texas 78768

OR2003-4742

Dear Ms. Elizalde:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 184116.

The Austin Independent School District (the "district"), which you represent, received a request for the requestor's personnel file and certain communications regarding the requestor. You state that the district will provide a portion of the requested information to the requestor. However, you claim that three sets of documents are excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.101 excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." This section encompasses information made confidential by other statutes such as section 154.073 of the Civil Practice and Remedies Code. Section 154.073 states in pertinent part:

(a) Except as provided by Subsections (c), (d), and (e),¹ a communication relating to the subject matter of any civil or criminal dispute made by a participant in an alternative dispute resolution procedure, whether before or after the institution of formal judicial proceedings, is confidential, is not subject to disclosure, and may not be used as evidence against the participant in any judicial or administrative proceeding.

(b) Any record made at an alternative dispute resolution procedure is confidential, and the participants or the third party facilitating the procedure may not be required to testify in any proceedings relating to or arising out of

¹ Subsections 154.073(c), (d), and (e) are inapplicable in this instance.

the matter in dispute or be subject to process requiring disclosure of confidential information or data relating to or arising out of the matter in dispute.

Civ. Prac. & Rem. Code § 154.073(a), (b). You state that “[d]uring the 2002-2003 school year, disputes arose between the principal and campus staff . . .” and that “[i]n order to try to resolve differences on the campus between the principal and staff, the school district used its ADR/Mediation process.” See Gov’t Code §§ 2009.001 - .055. Further, you explain that the submitted information was “prepared during the ADR/Mediation process . . .” Upon consideration of your arguments and our review of the information submitted as Exhibits 2, 3, and 4, we conclude that the district must withhold this information from disclosure under section 552.101 in conjunction with section 154.073 of the Civil Practices and Remedies Code.

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# 184116

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Ms. Vanessa Alba
3219 Foothills Trail
Round Rock, Texas 78681
(w/o enclosures)