



OFFICE of the ATTORNEY GENERAL
GREG ABBOTT

July 22, 2003

Ms. Julia Vaughan
Executive Director
Board of Law Examiners
P.O. Box 13486
Austin, Texas 78711-3486

OR2003-5044

Dear Ms. Vaughan:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 184606.

The Board of Law Examiners (the "board") received a written request for all "current, non-exempt and non-confidential . . . e-mail addresses held electronically by" the board. You indicate that some of the responsive information will be released to the requestor. You contend, however, that the remaining information coming within the scope of the request is excepted from required disclosure pursuant to section 552.137 of the Government Code.

Section 552.137 of the Government Code makes certain e-mail addresses confidential and provides in relevant part:

- (a) An e-mail address *of a member of the public* that is provided for the purpose of communicating electronically with a governmental body is confidential and not subject to disclosure under this chapter.
- (b) Confidential information described by this section that relates to a member of the public may be disclosed if the member of the public affirmatively consents to its release. [Emphasis added.]

You state that the board has released the public e-mail addresses of board "members and employees" as well as the "public e-mail addresses of" board contacts. However, you argue

that “private” e-mail addresses are excepted from required public disclosure pursuant to section 552.137. We therefore assume that the e-mail addresses you have released are governmental or business addresses and not private addresses of members of the public for purposes of section 552.137. Consequently, we will confine this ruling to the addresses that you have withheld from the requestor.

After reviewing the submitted information, we generally agree that the e-mail addresses you have withheld constitute private e-mail addresses that the board must withhold from the public pursuant to section 552.137. We note, however, that section 552.137 does not apply to a public employee’s governmental e-mail address. Consequently, we have identified some e-mail addresses that appear to constitute governmental addresses that are not protected by section 552.137 and thus must be released to the requestor. We have marked the documents accordingly.

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/RWP/seg

Ref: ID# 184606

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Mr. Brad L. Armstrong, J.D.
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(w/o enclosures)