



OFFICE *of the* ATTORNEY GENERAL  
GREG ABBOTT

July 31, 2003

Ms. Myrna S. Reingold  
Galveston County  
4127 Shearn Moody Plaza  
123 Rosenberg  
Galveston, Texas 77550-1454

OR2003-5281

Dear Ms. Reingold:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 185250.

The Galveston County Sheriff's Department (the "sheriff") received a written request for records pertaining to a particular investigation. You contend that the requested information is excepted from required disclosure pursuant to sections 552.101, 552.108, and 552.130 of the Government Code.

Initially, we note that the information you submitted as responsive to the request concerns an investigation of an alleged sexual assault of a child. Section 261.201(a) of the Family Code provides as follows:

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 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, and working papers used or developed in an investigation under this chapter or in providing services as a result of an investigation.

For purposes of section 261.201 a “child” is a person under 18 years of age who is not and has not been married or who has not had disabilities of minority removed for general purposes. Fam. Code § 101.003(a) (defining term child for purposes of title 5 of Family Code). The term “abuse” includes “sexual conduct harmful to a child’s mental, emotional, or physical welfare, including conduct that constitutes the offense of . . . sexual assault under Section 22.011, Penal Code.” Fam. Code § 261.001(1)(E).

The requested report concerns the alleged sexual assault of a person who was seventeen years old at the time of the incident. Thus, the requested information is subject to section 261.201 as a report concerning alleged abuse of a child, whether or not the allegations proved to be true. You have not indicated that the sheriff has adopted a rule that governs the release of this type of information. Therefore, we assume that no such regulation exists. Given that assumption, the requested information must be withheld in its entirety pursuant to section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 261.201 of the Family Code.<sup>1</sup> See Open Records Decision No. 440 at 2 (1986) (predecessor statute). *But see* Fam. Code § 261.201(b) (provision for court ordered access), (f) (limited right of access of parent 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

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<sup>1</sup>Because we resolve your request under section 261.201 of the Family Code, we do not address your other arguments for non-disclosure.

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,



Michael A. Pearle  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

MAP/RWP/sdk

Ref: ID# 185250

Enc: Submitted documents