ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

August 8, 2003

Ms. Tamara Pitts
Assistant City Attorney
City of Fort Worth
1000 Throckmorton Street
Fort Worth, Texas 76102

OR2003-5551

Dear Ms. Pitts:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 185636.

The Fort Worth Police Department (the "Department") received a request for information relating to an incident involving the requestor's son. You assert the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We reviewed the information you submitted and considered the exception you claim.

Section 552.101 excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Section 261.201 of the Family Code reads, in pertinent part, as follows:

> (a) 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, 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(a)(1), (2). Section 261.201 makes information regarding an investigation of suspected child abuse or neglect confidential. Based on your representations and our review of the submitted information, we believe the information consists of reports, records, and working papers used or developed in an investigation made under chapter 261 of the Family Code. The Department states it has not adopted regulations regarding release of this type of information; thus, we conclude the submitted incident report is confidential pursuant to section 261.201 of the Family Code. *See* Open Records Decision No. 440 at 2 (1986) (construing predecessor statute). Therefore, the Department must withhold Exhibit C, in its entirety, from the requestor under section 552.101 of the Government Code.[1]

Lastly, you ask this office to issue a previous determination authorizing the Department to withhold similar information if requested in the future. We decline to issue a previous determination at this time which would allow the Department to withhold the general category of information at issue in the future. *See* Open Records Decision No. 673 (2001).

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

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[1] We note that if the investigation has been referred to the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (the "DPRS"), a parent who is a requestor may be entitled to access to the DPRS's records. Section 261.201(g) of the Family Code provides that the DPRS, upon request and subject to its own rules:

> shall provide to the parent, managing conservator, or other legal representative of a child who is the subject of reported abuse or neglect information concerning the reported abuse or neglect that would otherwise be confidential under this section if the [DPRS] has edited the information to protect the confidentiality of the identity of the person who made the report and any other person whose life or safety may be endangered by the disclosure.

Fam. Code § 261.201(g).

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,

Christen Sorrell
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CHS/sdk

Ref: ID# 185636

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Ms. Rachel Valdez
c/o Tamara Pitts
City of Fort Worth
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Fort Worth, Texas 76102
(w/o enclosures)