



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

August 29, 2003

Ms. Julie B. Ross
Karger Key Barnes & Lynn, PC
University Centre II
1320 South University Drive, Ste. 720
Fort Worth, Texas 76107

OR2003-6086

Dear Ms. Ross:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 186832.

The City of Mineola (the "city") received a request for information pertaining to five specified individuals. You claim that the requested information, or portions thereof, is excepted from disclosure pursuant to sections 552.022, 552.101, and 552.108 of the Government Code.¹ We have considered the exceptions you claim and have reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.101 excepts from disclosure information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision. *See* Gov't Code § 552.101. Section 552.101 encompasses information that is protected from disclosure by the common-law right to privacy. Information must be withheld from disclosure under the common-law right to privacy when (1) it is highly intimate or embarrassing such that its release would be highly objectionable to a person of ordinary sensibilities and (2) there is no legitimate public interest in its disclosure. *See Industrial Found. v. Texas Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 685 (Tex. 1976), *cert. denied*, 430 U.S. 931 (1977). Where an individual's criminal history information has been compiled by a governmental entity, the information takes on a character that implicates the individual's right to privacy. *See United States Dep't of Justice v. Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press*, 489 U.S. 749 (1989). In this instance, the requestor seeks copies of unspecified information in which specified individuals are identified. Thus, the request requires the city to compile information relating to these individuals. Based on the reasoning set out in *Reporters Committee*, we conclude that such

¹ We note that section 552.022 of the Government Code does not constitute an exception to disclosure under the Public Information Act. Accordingly, we do not address your claim that any portion of the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.022 of the Government Code.

a compilation implicates the specified individuals' right to privacy to the extent that it includes investigations where the named individuals were suspects, arrestees, or defendants in a case. Accordingly, we conclude that to the extent that the city maintains responsive information that reveals that any of the specified individuals was a suspect, arrestee, or defendant in a case, such information must be withheld pursuant to section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the common-law right to privacy.²

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).

² Because we base our ruling on section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with the common-law right to privacy, we need not address your remaining arguments against disclosure of the requested information.

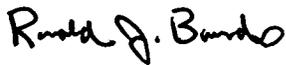
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If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 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,



Ronald J. Bounds
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

RJB/lmt

Ref: ID# 186832

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Richard M. Arnold, Investigator
Lone Star Legal Services
P.O. Box 132477
Tyler, Texas 75713
(w/o enclosures)