ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

September 15, 2003

Ms. Michele Austin
Assistant City Attorney
City of Houston - Legal Department
P.O. Box 1562
Houston, Texas 77251-1562

OR2003-6443

Dear Ms. Austin:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 190143.

The Houston Police Department (the "department") received a request for a specific incident report. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 58.007 of the Family Code. We have considered the exception you claim and have reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note, and you acknowledge, that the department failed to timely provide the requestor with a written statement regarding your desire to withhold the requested information from disclosure. In addition, you failed to provide the requestor with your written communication to this office asking for this decision. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(d) (stating types of information governmental body seeking open records decision must provide to requestor). The department's failure to fully comply with the procedural requirements of the Public Information Act results in the presumption that the requested information is public. *See id.* § 552.302; *Hancock v. State Bd. of Ins.*, 797 S.W.2d 379 (Tex. App.—Austin 1990, no writ). In order to overcome this presumption of openness, the department must provide compelling reasons why the information should not be disclosed. *Hancock*, 797 S.W.2d at 381. Since the applicability of section 552.101 provides such a compelling reason, we will address the department's arguments.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Section 552.101 encompasses confidentiality provisions such as section 58.007 of the Family Code. Juvenile law enforcement records relating to conduct that occurred on or after

September 1, 1997 are confidential under section 58.007. The relevant language of section 58.007(c) reads as follows:

> (c) Except as provided by Subsection (d), law enforcement records and files concerning a child and information stored, by electronic means or otherwise, concerning the child from which a record or file could be generated may not be disclosed to the public and shall be:
>
> > (1) if maintained on paper or microfilm, kept separate from adult files and records;
> >
> > (2) if maintained electronically in the same computer system as records or files relating to adults, be accessible under controls that are separate and distinct from controls to access electronic data concerning adults; and
> >
> > (3) maintained on a local basis only and not sent to a central state or federal depository, except as provided by Subchapter B.

The information at issue involves juvenile conduct that occurred after September 1, 1997. You do not indicate, nor does it appear, that any of the exceptions in section 58.007 apply; therefore, the requested information is confidential pursuant to section 58.007(c) of the Family Code. Accordingly, the department must withhold the requested information in its entirety under section 552.101 of the Government 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

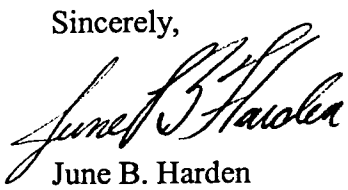
records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these 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,



June B. Harden
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JBH/seg

Ref: ID# 190143

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Mr. Philip W. Gold
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(w/o enclosures)